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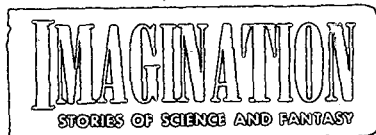
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William L. Hamling
Editor

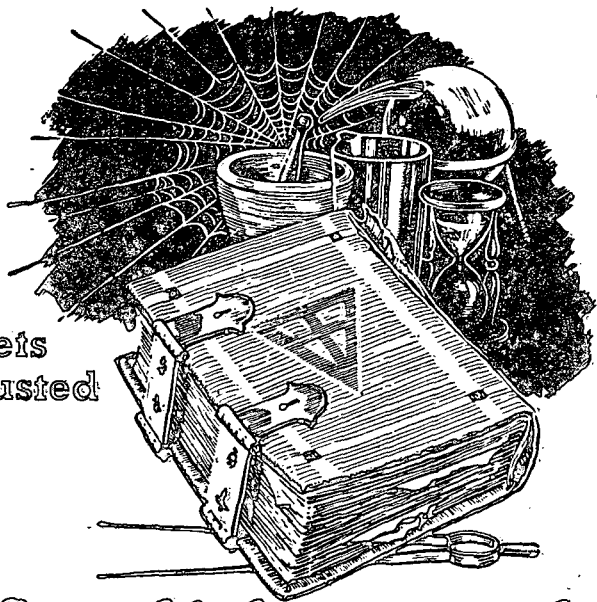
Frances Hamling
Managing Editor

W. E. Jerry
Art Editor

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The Editorial

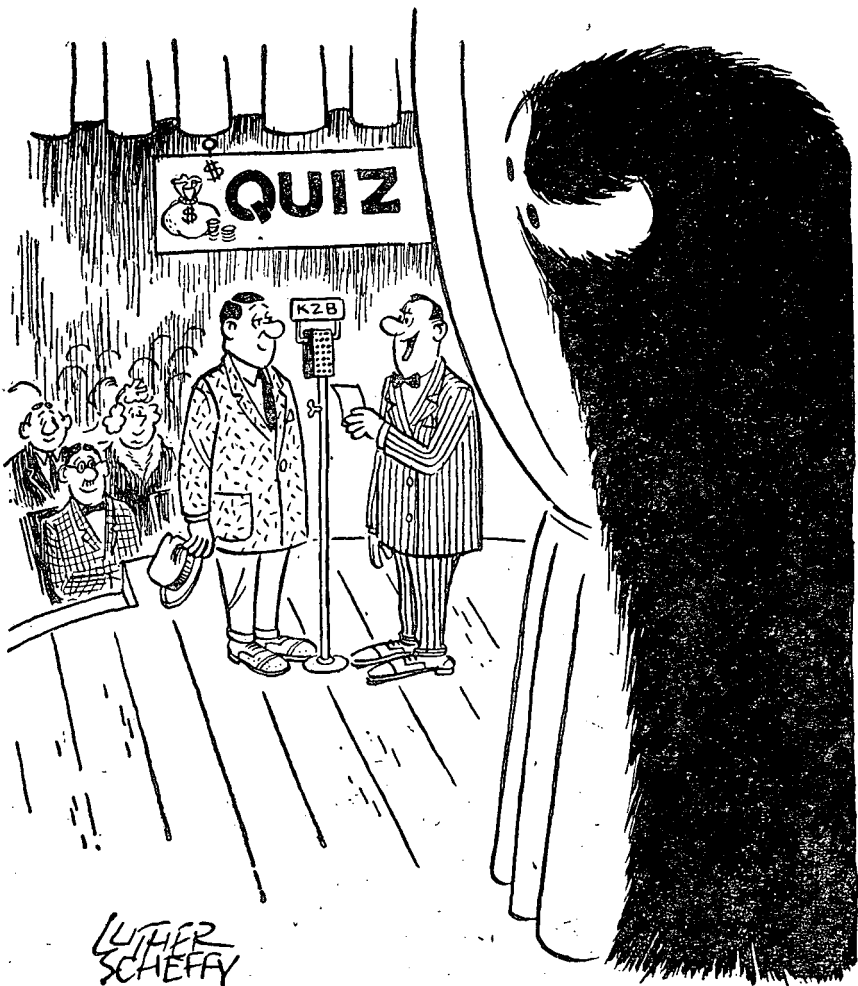
AS announced last issue, we're inaugurating a new department in *Madge*, THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB. We held off putting this issue to press until the last possible day so that we might begin the new department in this issue. You'll note that we were able to do so, and you'll also note here that we're extending a cordial invitation to all of you who are interested in making new friends in science fiction to send in your own listing for the department. We have a hunch that THE COSMIC PEN-CLUB will prove to be one of *Madge's* most popular features. For that matter, it will be a feature of our companion magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES. So much for things new.

AN old friend visited us last week. Dwight V. Swain was in town for an educator's convention, and he came out and had dinner with us. After reminiscing about the old days we got around to asking him when his next novel was due on our desk. He allowed as how it's been due for some time and assured us he'd have it in the mail within two weeks. We're looking forward to receiving it, and you'll be reading it shortly thereafter. Dwight then announced with justifiable pride that he just achieved professorial rank at the

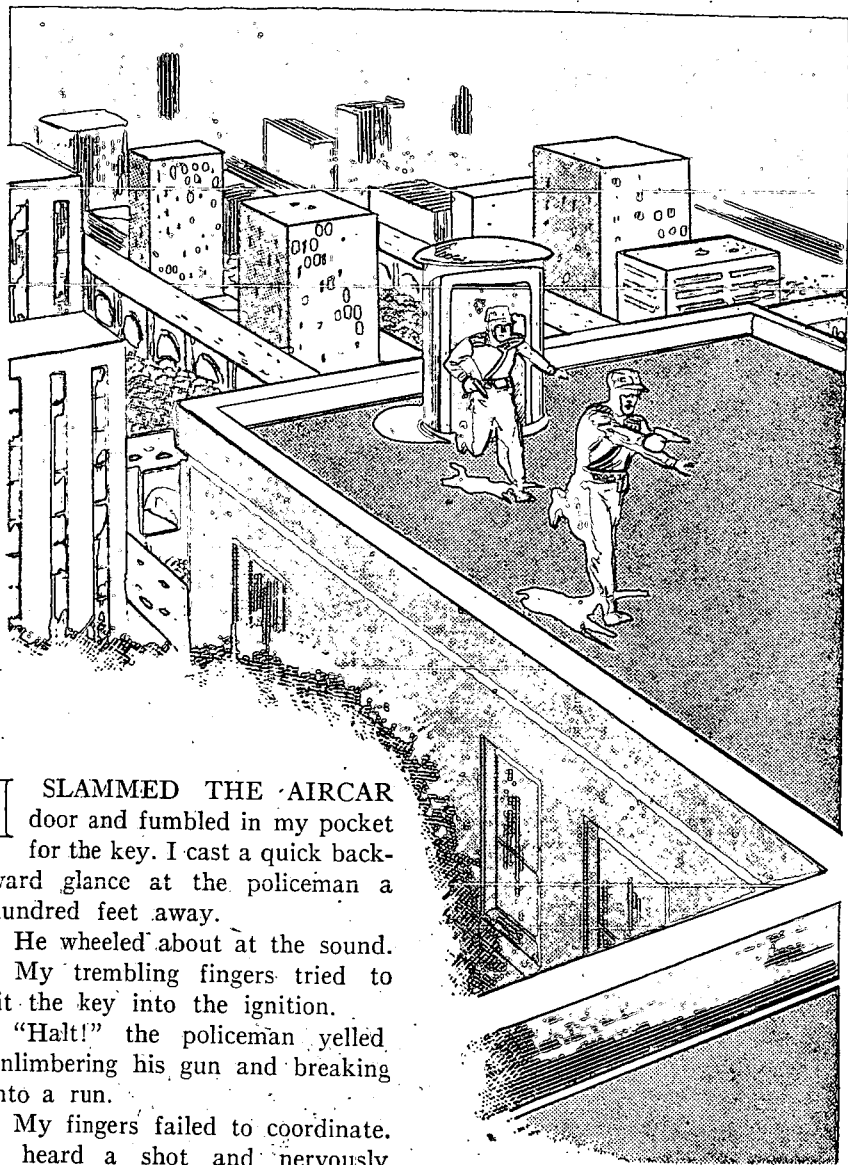
University of Oklahoma. We promised him that we would not refer to him as "The Professor" but we didn't promise we wouldn't mention the fact. Nice going, professor—that is, Dwight!

ANOTHER well-known personality in the field dropped in just a few days ago. Kenneth Arnold, the man who first sighted the "flying saucers" over Mt. Rainier in the forties, stopped by to say hello. We had never met Arnold before, although we had "known" him intimately during our editorial days at *Amazing Stories* when Arnold started the flying saucer rage. Ken's a charming guy, and we have no doubt he actually saw the elusive craft as he flew his plane through the Washington skies. Ken's pretty wrapped up in uranium prospecting these days, and we understand he may have made an excellent strike someplace along the Continental Divide. Pretty hush-hush at this moment but we wish him the best of luck.

FOR those of you who like a bit of sophistication in your reading we might recommend here the newest — and biggest — addition to our publishing family; ROGUE magazine in the men's field. Give it a try... And see you next issue..... wlh



"And if you should miss the question . . ."



I SLAMMED THE AIRCAR door and fumbled in my pocket for the key. I cast a quick backward glance at the policeman a hundred feet away.

He wheeled about at the sound. My trembling fingers tried to fit the key into the ignition.

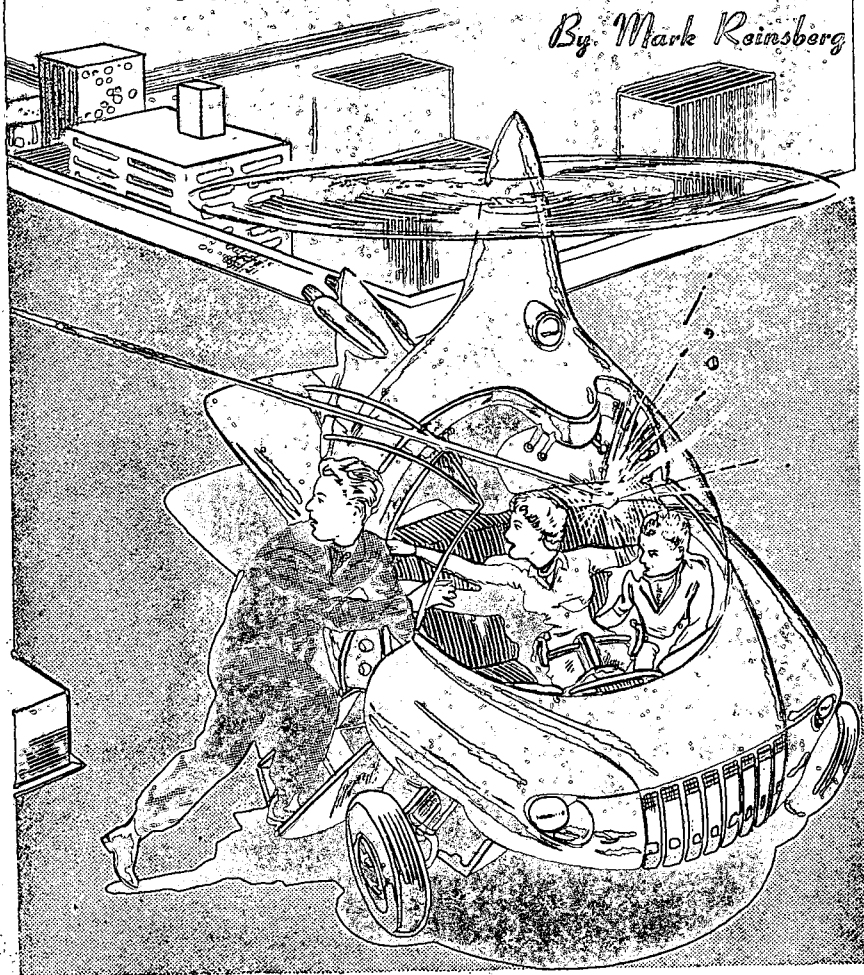
"Halt!" the policeman yelled unlimbering his gun and breaking into a run.

My fingers failed to coordinate. I heard a shot and nervously

Bart Sponsor was a Top Competitor and he pitied those who were not. But one small error made him seek retirement. Yet, he could only—

COMPETE OR DIE!

By Mark Reinsberg



dropped the key. I bent over frantically to scoop it up.

There was another shot. Pieces of glass trickled down my neck. I straightened up and saw a hole in the windshield, level with my eyes.

"Hands up!" The cop had slowed down to take careful aim. He was so close now he could hardly miss.

"Don't shoot!" I shouted. "I surrender!"

I inserted the key in the ignition with desperate precision, gunning the engines so hard that the ship spun halfway around. The policeman leaped out of the way as my Cad Super roared past him and lurched into the air.

I heard a tattoo of shots from the ground and then we were out of range.

I swore as the acceleration crushed me deep into the seat. My forehead was pounding.

"Bart Sponsor, fugitive," I thought bitterly. "And only a half-hour ago I was a pillar of society. Worst thing I had to worry about was a speeding ticket . . ."

. . . I had been griping to my wife as usual about the rush-hour morning traffic above Chicago.

"Look at this. Just look at this," I said disgustedly.

Below us, the lanes were choked with ponderous, slow-moving com-

muter copters. Around us, flivver-jets clogged the expressway like millions of migrating birds. We couldn't make more than three hundred miles an hour.

"The stupid shlubs," I muttered resentfully. "They ought to ride the pneumatic tubes to work."

"The airlines should be reserved for Top Competitors only," said Celia teasingly. "Like you, dear."

I ignored her sarcasm and scanned the empty lane overhead. All that blue sky set aside for outgoing traffic, and nothing in sight. A shameful waste.

I gunned our Cad Super, joyfully, defiantly, and scooted up over the assigned traffic stream at a thousand per. Celia gave me an alarmed look.

"Bart! You'll get a ticket."

I grinned and kicked our speed up an additional two hundred.

Illegal, of course, but I made terrific time crossing the Iowa-Illinois border where Chicagoland begins. I didn't squeeze back into the expressway until mighty Municipal Tower came into view through the dense industrial haze above Lake Michigan. There atop the building stood a gigantic sign revolving on a pivot with the wind. It bore the seal of Chicago and the stunning legend: I WILL COMPETE. Most inspiring motto in the world, I think.

Celia touched my hand. "We'll have to stop at the bank first."

"No time," I said. "We're due at the school at nine-thirty."

"It won't hurt to be a few minutes late. This is important, Bart."

We have a good marriage, and I don't quarrel with Celia's wishes. But this meant another delay, and I could already see half the morning shot, what with the meeting in the principal's office, and afterwards perhaps taking Freddie out for a soda or something to make him feel secure and loved. What a lot of trouble that boy was getting into lately.

I wheeled out of traffic and feathered down to the roof of the 1st National. A conveyer belt carried our ship toward the teller's window.

Celia opened her purse and withdrew a bank form. "Here, I think you'll have to sign this, darling."

I voiced my irritation. "Withdraw it in your own name. It's a joint account. Personally, I don't understand how you can need more money when I just gave you four hundred yesterday."

"This is a very large amount," said Celia softly. "Bank requires it."

"How much?" I asked suspiciously.

"Ten thousand." She was staring at me intently with her almond-

shaded eyes. Her full red lips were parted in the faintest trace of a smile, as her neat brown-pencilled eyebrows arched slightly in amused defiance.

She was daring me to ask the obvious question. Hell, I thought, I can afford it. I signed the form and passed it back to her.

We were at the teller window. She scribbled on the sheet and handed it to the clerk.

"Now," I said, feeling that I'd fulfilled the code of gallantry, "may I ask what you need it for?"

"Certainly, dear. I'm giving it to the Mendelsohns as a going-away present. Tonight at their farewell party."

"What! Ten thousand credits? Are you insane! The Mendelsohns mean nothing to me." I was so upset that I kicked the degravity pedal and we started to rise from the roof. I brought us down with a thud. •

"They mean a lot to me," said Celia calmly. "They used to mean a lot to you too."

"But ten thousand!" I protested. "What do you think I am, a millionaire philanthropist?"

"It is a lot of money," Celia agreed placatingly. "But the Mendelsohns are leaving tomorrow for Primus Gladus. We'll never see them again."

"So what!" I said heatedly.

"Thousands of people go to the stars as colonists. Thousands of failures like the Mendelsohns think their luck will change on another planet. Does this mean that - -?"

"Bart, consider," said Celia. "If they had remained here on Earth as our friends, there would have been many occasions in a lifetime when I would have sent them remembrances. The birth of children. Anniversaries. Graduations. Confirmations, bar mitzvahs, wedding presents. Funeral wreaths. All I've done now is roll up all those gifts of a lifetime into one farewell present, of a size that will help them a little on their new world."

"I've cut off a lot of heads for that money. Grain brokerage is a brutal profession, what with thirty billion mouths clamoring for food, and the government keeping speculation in a straight-jacket, and that insurrection on Venus, the granary of the solar system, making wheat futures a nightmare. This kind of generosity leaves me cold. I had more to say on the subject, but the bank teller spoke up to Celia.

"Your identification, please?"

Celia showed him her wrist plate.

"Ah, Mrs. Sponsor, I'm sorry to inconvenience you, but this is such a large amount that we'll need your husband's personal verification. Bank rules, you know."

"This is my husband."

My irritation mounted. "I'm Sponsor," I said to the teller, flourishing my wrist band. "What's the difficulty?"

"Ah, Mr. Sponsor, would you like to step in a moment and speak to our chief cashier?"

"I haven't time," I blurted sharply. "Give my wife the money!" We were already ten minutes late to our school appointment.

The teller looked abashed and hesitant.

"Look here," I demanded, "if we don't get better service around here I'll take my account elsewhere!"

That did it. He fussed around and finally handed Celia the bundle which she had some trouble fitting into her purse. "Small denominations," she explained. I gunned our car peevishly; I must admit, and the acceleration shoved her back into the seat rest. We were ten minutes late already. I should have called my office.

We soared into air above old Chicago, the part rebuilt after World War III. The lake claimed a good share of the blast area, of course, but that's what makes our city so unusually beautiful now. Four hundred tiny islands dot the lakefront, some connected by causeways, others reachable only by air-

car or boat.

"Why are you so cross?" said Celia, taking the offensive the way women do when they've pulled some outrageous stunt.

"Look, you can't have it both ways. You can give them the money, but you can't get me to say I like the idea."

"Solly Mendelsohn was once your closest friend."

"Solly is a poor competitor, Celia. Let's face up to it. He has brains. He once showed signs of being a brilliant soil chemist, but he washed out of school. And then he became a fertilizer salesman, and he couldn't make a go of that. And after that he took up hydroponic farming, but he wasn't a success at that either. No wonder he wants to try another planet!"

"Solly has had a lot of personal misfortunes."

"That's an excuse all the shlubs use. No. The fact is, he just can't compete. And unless you compete in this world, you're dead."

Below on its own crescent-shaped island lay Chicago Classical School. I put our ship into a fast elevator dive. "My sympathies," I added, "go to Dolores. She's a bright, attractive kid. Keen competitor. She didn't deserve a shlub for a husband." I paused. "And about that party they're giving tonight. I'm not going."

CHICAGO CLASSICAL was frankly a boarding school for privileged kids. It taught the first six years, and no better I'm sure than the public schools of Chicago. But there was social distinction. The contacts would be good for Freddie later on. Freddie boarded there five days a week and came home to us on weekends, uncommunicative about his experiences, but happy to go romping with me in the woods and ravine adjoining our estate near Mason City. Unfortunately, that wasn't too often. Competitive pressure kept me in Chicago sometimes three or four weeks at a stretch.

When they gave the first graders a word-picture test, Celia once told me, Freddie had represented the word *father* by the symbols of a bald head, pipe and briefcase. After that, whenever I couldn't get home on Saturday or Sunday, I made an effort to have lunch with the boy in Chicago at least once during the week. But of course you can't get to know your son very well that way.

"Just what is this trouble Freddie's involved in?" I asked as we descended. "Why don't you keep me better informed on the boy?"

"I try to, but when have you had time to listen? I usually see you at our cocktail parties for clients, or else at three in the

morning when you drop into bed too exhausted to get into pajamas."

"Well, this matter with the principal. Are you sure it's so serious?"

"They never ask for both parents unless it is," Celia assured me, glancing soberly at the school buildings as we came to earth.

We parked, I noticed, alongside a dark blue official car, with the municipal seal, and the initials S.T.A.R.S. "Never heard of that one," I told Celia as we walked to the main dormitory and administration building.

The place was a gloomy gray, vine-covered neo-gothic structure which ignored almost a thousand years of architectural progress. An old-fashioned electric eye opened the door. Inside, the building smelled like stale bread, musty linen and floor varnish, combined with a dash of urine. The interior lighting was unnaturally bright, it seemed to me, like in a surgical arena. The only harmonious note was struck by the mural in the vestibule. One entire wall was covered by an allegorical painting of sports, professions, and industry, with the phrase **COMPETE OR PERISH** emblazoned boldly across the top.

Celia nudged me. "A little raw for school kids, don't you think?"

This was an old, unhealed grievance between us. "Those are the

twenty-fourth century facts of life," I replied evenly.

We reported to the receptionist robot in an alcove controlling the inner set of doors.

"You are fifteen minutes late," said the machine. "I will announce you. Be seated please."

We remained standing. I spied a public wall phone and jerked into awareness. "Excuse me, honey. I have to call the office!"

I hastily dialed our number and got the busy signal. Wow! All nine lines were tied up, including our human and our robot receptionists. I immediately dialed our unlisted private number, and somebody answered with a curse, and I knew it was my partner Charlie Spacker.

"Compete, man! Compete!" he shouted. "Where the hell are you?"

"Chicago Classical School. Personal problem. I told you about it."

"Well, get over here quick! That Venus situation is about to blow up, and we're tied up to the tune of three hundred million in wheat and soybeans!"

"I'll be over within a half hour. Meanwhile, have Claire book passage on the next Venus rocket. One of us has got to go there."

"Willco," said Claire. She always monitored our calls.

"All right," stormed Charlie, "that may help us a month from

now. But what about now? Do I buy or sell? These customers are drowning me!"

Charlie was a great bluff man who inspired the clients' confidence, but he quailed at policy decisions. I thought fast. I'd go there and make a deal with the insurrectionists. Help finance the rebellion in exchange for exclusive first option. If they won, good. If they lost, status quo anyway.

Celia was gesturing urgently as the inner door opened.

"Buy!" I said and I slammed down the receiver.

IT WAS HARD to adjust to the dim lighting in the principal's office. His room was loaded with antique fiberglass furniture of the twenty-first century. He sat behind, or rather within, a donut-shaped desk, a moon-faced man with short, monk-like haircut, and bulbous nose.

"You are the parents of Edmund Sponsor?" We nodded. He pressed a button. "Very well. We will send for the boy."

He swivelled around to face a wall of slanting glass which overlooked the children's playground. We could see two ranks of boys in a tug-of-war, and some little girls playing red-rover.

"Scott," he said into a tiny microphone on his desk top. A play-

ground instructor looked up.

"Yes, sir?"

"Please send Edmund Sponsor to my office."

"He's not here, sir. I believe he's in the dormitory."

"How does that happen?" demanded the principal. "This is game time."

"He declined to join in the competition, sir."

"I see. Thank you."

I felt a hot flush of embarrassment. My son non-competitive? That seemed impossible. He must be ill. It was an insulting accusation.

The principal flicked on the wall visa-screen. It showed a lean, rather formally-attired man seated on a lounge in the ante-room, next to a uniformed policeman.

"Masfield? I believe it would expedite matters if you would find Edmund Sponsor in the dormitory and bring him here. Would you do that, please?"

Masfield nodded and the screen darkened. The principal turned to us.

"This incident on the playground which you just witnessed may perhaps spare us all an overly long explanation. Mr. Sponsor, I have been in touch with your wife from time to time, and I assume she has kept you informed on your boy's progress. Or should we say,

lack of progress?"

I felt a sense of numb shock. Celia had told me nothing. I managed to control my outward signs of surprise. "Yes, she has," I said calmly, crossing my legs. "But of course we have a fiercely competitive line, and I haven't been able to follow the situation as well as one might wish."

"Would you tell me, in brief, what it all amounts to, and what you suggest as a remedy? Both Mrs. Sponsor and I are willing and eager to cooperate."

"I hope," said the principal, "that you will remember what you have just said when I propose the remedy. As to the problem itself, I must put it bluntly - - your son Edmund refuses to compete."

If any other man had said this to me I would have smashed his face in. Celia looked at me warningly. Again I masked my feelings.

"This is a terrible thing to hear," I said sweetly. "But surely it can't be as stark and simple as that. Freddie must be ill or emotionally disturbed. Have your doctors given him a checkup? Have your psychoanalysts examined him?"

"Long ago and continually, Mr. Sponsor. That was your wife's original suggestion. Your boy was completely uncooperative with the analysts. Resistant. Negatively competitive, if you know what I

mean. In fact, I will repeat what one of our doctors said. If your boy could reverse his attitude, and put all the energy he uses to fight the system into battling his future economic opponents, he'd become a Top Competitor. However, a year has gone by, and we have not been able to bring about the slightest change. Now, in fact, the situation has gotten out of hand."

"But," I said, trying to sound detached and clinical, "how does this non-competitiveness, as you say, manifest itself in our son?" The prefix *non* had a bitter taste in my mouth.

"In every way," said the principal. "He won't play competitive games with the other children. Intellectually, he won't exert himself against his classmates. Financially, he refuses to earn bonus points selling magazine subscriptions in his leisure time. This, as you know, goes against the very principles on which our democracy is based. It's subversive in its influence on the other children. If he were not so young, if he did not come from a well-known competitive family, one would almost be tempted to think Edmund an Australian spy!"

"Come now!" said Celia indignantly. "Expel Freddie from your school if you wish, but don't slander him."

The door buzzed softly, then slid open. Freddie entered, followed closely by Masefield.

Freddie had been crying. His eyes opened wide and an expression of joy hit his face as he saw us.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, rushing to Celia's arms. She hugged him fervently. I patted him manfully on the shoulder, but I felt shy and a little inept. "Dad!" he added, running the back of one hand across his tear-stained cheeks.

"How are you, son?" I said inadequately.

Freddie looked up at me imploringly. "Take me away from here, dad. *Please* take me away from here!" He buried his head on Celia's breast and started to sob.

"We will, darling," said Celia. We exchanged swift glances.

"We certainly will, son, if you're unhappy here," I said rather mechanically. I was, to tell the truth, rather shocked by the emotional display. Freddie had always been such a self-contained little boy, so beyond his years in control and understanding, so undemonstrative.

"I think," said the principal portentously, "that matters would be best served if Edmund waited outside."

"I agree." There was no reason for Freddie to hear whatever remained to be said.

The kid made quite a fuss about

leaving us, even for a few minutes, but in the end Masefield escorted him out with friendly firmness.

"We are all in accord then, that your son is to leave Chicago Classical School?"

"I think so," said Celia, with unconcealed hostility.

"What steps do we take now?" I asked more civilly. "Do we enroll him in the second grade of public school? I mean, is his work here fully transferable?"

THE PRINCIPAL SEEMED

to reach very carefully for his next words. He seemed in fact faintly apprehensive. "Mr. Sponsor, under normal circumstances a child's credits from Chicago Classical are acceptable at more than par in the public school system. But this is a case in which the authorities are obliged to exercise jurisdiction."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Celia said angrily.

"Darling," I said patting her hand, "control yourself. Let's try to hear this thing objectively."

"Yes, Mrs. Sponsor, as your husband has said, this is a matter which requires considerable detachment. We two have had a number of conversations in the past year, and I must say candidly that you did not seem to realize the delicacy and seriousness of Edmund's prob-

lem. By authorities I mean, of course, the juvenile delinquency courts."

"Now I'm the one who doesn't understand," I said very mildly.

"You are aware, Mr. Sponsor, that aggressive non-competitiveness is carried on the statute books as a misdemeanor."

Scorn and ridicule were in Celia's voice. "But Freddie is a seven-year-old!"

"Quite. But our concern as educators is with the future adult. And unless the child's habits of thought are corrected in the early, formative years, all of his aberrations are magnified by maturity. Would you want your son to grow up a criminal, a seditionist?"

"You need not worry about that," I answered firmly. "I'll take Freddie in hand. He'll learn the value of competition if I have to beat it into him!"

"I'm afraid it's a little too late for that," said the educator. "School is a powerful influence, but home is the decisive influence in the molding of a child's character and outlook. The plain and simple fact is that your home - - Edmund's home - - has been an *anti-competitive* influence! No school can counterbalance it."

"That's absurd! Do you realize what line of business I'm engaged in?"

"I'm fully aware of that. However, how much time do you actually spend with your son, teaching him the precepts of our democracy?"

"What are you driving at?"

He had made up his mind to say it. He leaned forward across his donut-shaped desk and said very deliberately: "When the home fails in its duty, the state must step in and do the job. We have recommended that Edmund be placed in our city's Special Training and Re-Education School, and that he be isolated from all parental influence for a period of five years. Or until such time as his attitude shall have displayed a fundamental change."

Celia was on her feet. "What! You mean we can't see him for five years!"

I was leaning over his desk, almost yelling. "You are not going to take our boy away from us. We'll fight it in the courts."

The principal likewise stood up. He stared at us, disdainful in his power. "The court has already decided that point. I thought you were sensible, cooperative people who were willing to fight and sacrifice for the preservation of Competition. I thought I was doing you a special favor in giving you a last moment or two with your son. That, you must understand, went against all rules. I'm sorry

now that I extended you the favor."

Celia was tearfully, bitterly sarcastic. "You extended us the favor - - "

I was trembling with rage. "We are taking Freddie with us."

"You can't."

"You just try to stop me."

The principal smiled, again disdainfully. "He has already left with the STARS officer. There is nothing you can do. Except leave my office."

I was stunned. That blue car we parked next to. I was paralyzed. I wanted to smash the principal's face - - even if it meant going to jail.

His desk buzzer sounded. He flicked a switch.

"Yes?"

It was the intercom to the receptionist.

"Mr. Masefield."

"Tell him to wait a moment."

Masefield's voice broke in. "It can't wait. That kid has gotten away from us! He's locked himself in an aircar. Who owns that Cad Super?"

I staggered the principal with a straight hard punch in the mouth. I threw another to his jaw and another in his solar plexus. I leaped onto his desk and seized him by the throat and battered his head against the desk top. Then I drove my fist into his face again and

again until he lost consciousness.

Celia had had the presence of mind to turn off the microphone. I flicked it on.

"Masefield?" I was trusting the phone to depersonalize my voice.

"Yes."

"The owner will be right out to open it. Is there anyone by the car now?"

"Officer Fegerty."

"Good. Then the boy can't get away. Come to my office for a minute."

I kicked at the control panel and ripped out all the wires in sight, then socked the principal three or four more times for good measure. We exited as casually as we could, nodding pleasantly as we passed Masefield in the hall. Then we broke into a frantic run, through the inner and outer doors, pausing only long enough for Celia to smash the electric eye mechanism with her purse as the outer door swung shut. Nicely competitive of her.

We raced out to the parking lot. The cop was standing beside our car, and I could see Freddie cowering in the back seat, behind closed windows and locked doors.

"Officer Fegerty!" I said breathlessly. "Mr. Masefield says for you to come to the principal's office immediately! Something's happened."

He hesitated. "What about the kid?"

"We'll watch him! You'd better hurry!"

He headed for the administration building at a lumbering trot.

We waved wildly to Freddie. He pounced, with uncontrollable joy, on the door release. Celia plunged into the car, and then I. Out of the corner of my eye I could see that the policeman had stopped. He was viewing us with uncertainty. Then he yelled and started to run toward us, unlimbering his gun from its holster.

My trembling fingers fitted the key into the ignition. I heard a shot and a thudding sound. Then another, and a hole appeared in my side and front windows. I gunned our car like fury and we rocketed into the air so fast that Celia, holding Freddie tightly in her arms, moaned at the terrible acceleration.

We were far above Chicago's islands. Nothing, not even a police car, could catch our Cad Super.

I turned to my son. "You're a bright boy, Freddie. I'm proud of you." A real competitor at heart.

Then my eye caught the great municipal sign, with its motto **I WILL COMPETE**. And I realized for the first time the seriousness of what we had done.

"**THE ALARM** will be out any minute," I told Celia. "I must land."

I nosed our ship down to the lowest air line, merging with slow local traffic above the city. For once I was not pleased to be driving such a conspicuous car. Where to land?—Certainly not my usual parking lot. They'd check there as a matter of routine.

Celia read my thoughts. "Where would they least expect us?"

"Navy Pier traffic fines bureau!" I exclaimed. "They have a free parking lot there."

"That's good, for the car," said Celia, "but risky for us." She thought. "The Art Institute. They have a private lot and we're members."

"Ridiculous!" I started to say, then checked myself. "That's good. That's cultural. The cops would never think we'd go looking at pictures."

There would be people there, a crowd in which we could lose ourselves. A big building, where we could remain all day, if necessary, without attracting suspicion. A place where I could think. I desperately needed to think.

"I don't want to go to the Art Institute," Freddie whined. "I want to go home."

Celia tried to comfort him. "Mother wants to go home too,

dear one, but we can't go home just now."

We sure can't, I thought grimly. I maneuvered past the petal-shaped peak of Tribune Tower with its banner - - 100% COMPETITION MEANS 100% AMERICAN, past the upper stories of the Prudential Building ("WE'RE COMPETING - - ARE YOU?"), past the squat old Bible Federation building (COMPETER, REMEMBER ST. PETER!), and at last settled with a sigh behind the museum.

"I want to go home," Freddie whimpered, his eyes starting to tear again. He was a thin, rather bony little boy, with light brownish eyes like Celia's, and a forceful jaw that was quivering now at the point of a sob.

Celia carressed his curly brown hair. "We're going to spend the entire day together, darling. We're going to look at some wonderful pictures."

I was irritated, but I guess you can't expect too much understanding of a kid.

We entered the building from the rear, parking lot entrance. The Art Institute was one of those wild, non-geometric creations of the Twenty-first century reconstruction period. It was a flat, one-storied building. The outside was partially circular, with a pearly transparent roof. Inside it formed

a spiral, with galleries partitioned off like the chambers of nautilus shell. At the eye of the spiral stood a small sunken garden and tea room.

I looked at my watch. Ten-fifteen. "We can stay here until five, if need be," I told Celia. "Don't leave the building until I return."

"Where are you going?" Celia was calm outwardly. Only her eyes registered alarm.

"To see my lawyer. Then to the office. Then to the bank. I have a hunch that ten thousand won't be enough for our present needs."

"Bart, I - -"

"Let's not discuss it now. First I want to find out how we stand legally."

I patted Freddie's cheek. "Bye, son. I'll try to get back in time for lunch with you and mother."

I strode off, pausing at the main entrance to call the law offices of Devron, Beach and Feldman. Beach was my man and he was in. I hailed a coptercab and we lumbered over to the gold-black, ellipsoid Richmond Building opposite City Hall.

Beach was a Top Competitor, a slim, trim, fit, fighting individual with graying black hair, and a smiling, suntanned face underscored by hard lines of determination. He was humorless, busy and abrupt in all his dealings, but he'd

never yet lost a case for me.

"I have to be in court in ten minutes, Bart. Can you give it to me briefly?"

"I don't know if I can. There are so many aspects. To begin with, I assaulted a man. Knocked him unconscious."

"Government official? Top Competitor?"

"No, just a private school principal."

"Injure him badly?"

"I don't know. He was still out when I left."

Beach's eyes flickered with surprise.

"You're not a violent type. He must have provoked you?"

"Called my son non competitive."

Beach dismissed the matter with a gesture. "You've nothing to worry about." He paused, his shrewd eyes surveying. "Is that all?"

"Unfortunately not." I was ashamed to tell the whole story, and I've told Beach some pretty raw ones in the past without flinching. "In effect, I've defied a court order concerning my son. Obstructed justice, you might say."

"Leave the legal definitions to me," said Beach tersely. "Tell me what you did."

"Well, the principal was turning my son Freddie over to some guy from the Special Training and

Re-Education School. Without any advance notice. Just bang! Like that. Called Celia and me in this morning to tell us. As though it were already an accomplished fact. Well, I knew it was illegal on his part. Imagine that! Taking a kid away from his parents for five years! So I snatched up Freddie and left him with Celia in a safe place and came directly to you. Beach, I want to fight this. I want you to take a law book and beat the city's brains in!"

Beach stood up. He would not look me in the eye, but the hard lines on his face showed up like steel cables.

"I won't touch the case. You'll have to find someone else."

A wave of shock and fear surged through my veins. "Beach, you're the best man in the city! You've got to take it!"

"I couldn't win. No one could. You're in trouble, Bart. You'd better hand over your son to the school." He was thinking out loud. "Plead emotional upset on your part. It's a terrible thing for a father, a Top Competitor, to be told he has a noncompetitive son. You momentarily lost control of yourself. Bring him to the school voluntarily. Say you thrashed him within an inch of his life. Say you've been too busy competing to pay much attention to your son's

upbringing. But now you're turning him over to the school, and you want them to indoctrinate him thoroughly in the principles of democracy.

"You'd have a scandal, of course, but people would sympathize with you. Applaud your resoluteness.

"Yes, you would get off that way. I still couldn't handle the case, naturally, but I can recommend someone."

"Beach," I said firmly, "I won't give the boy up."

He was silent for a moment. "Then you're ruined. You're a fugitive from justice. You're only hope is in Australia."

That was a slap in the face. "Australia!" I shouted. "That crummy socialist state? That shlub society? No sir, I'm staying right here, in the free competitive world!"

Beach looked ostentatiously at his watch. "You'll have to excuse me. I have a case in court. A murder case, where I can do my client some good."

He picked up his briefcase and went to the door, and stood there courteously showing me out. "I don't imagine I'll be seeing you again, Bart. Take a lawyer's parting advice. Don't go home. Don't go to your office. Put your family on the next ship for Australia." He

put his hand on my shoulder, adding, not unkindly, "I also advise you to leave this building quickly. You realize that I must report you to the police."

I FREE-FELL down the elevator shaft, stopping at the mezzanine rather than the ground floor. There was a balcony and staircase overlooking the main entrance. I could see a policeman loitering at the doorway. I had no reason to believe Beach had immediately made his report. Even if he had, was it likely the police could reach the scene sooner than it took me to drop thirty-eight stories? Nevertheless, there the cop was.

I went back to the elevator, rode the updraft to the roof landing. A police ship was idling over the Richmond Building. Coincidence. I saw a taxi his fare only twenty feet away, and I wanted desperately to hail the cab, but I couldn't take the chance. I remained for a minute by the doorway. The police ship also lingered.

I asked a building employee where the freight elevator was. He pointed the direction, and I stripped off my suit jacket and folded it around my waist beneath my shirt. Then I rolled up my shirt sleeves and stepped into the downshaft. I hit bottom two floors below street-level. There was a

clerk in a receiving room.

"Has some office furniture come in for 1108?" I asked in a shlub accent.

"Nothin' yet," said the clerk.

I thumbed at the doorway. "That the freight tube?"

"Yup."

"Maybe they're waiting for me outside?"

It was a silly thing to say but it gave me the excuse of looking. I ducked my head out and saw that the dock was empty. There was a rush of sewer-tainted air, and the hum of the city's subterranean conveyor belt.

"The idiots!" I exclaimed for the clerk's benefit. "There they are at the next building."

I slammed the door and hopped onto the belt which was moving at about five miles an hour. I jumped off at the next dock we came to, rode the freight shaft up, then got off at the sixth floor.

Quickly I rolled down my sleeves, whipped out the jacket from under my shirt, smoothed down my hair and was presentable again. I walked around until I found the passenger shaft and descended to the ground level.

I was more angry than frightened. I a fugitive! A Top Competitor forced to flee through the city sewers! What a rotten, unjust turn of events.

What next? I was outside now, on the pedestrian belt moving eastward toward the lake. Obviously, whatever we did, wherever we went, money would be necessary. The bank, then. I would draw out my entire account. A second thought. No, not the entire amount; that might excite suspicion, cause a spot check with the police. Half would be better - - a hundred and twenty-five thousand.

I entered the 1st National and went to a counter to write out a check. A cautioning light suddenly flared in my brain. What if the authorities had called the bank - - frozen my assets?

There's only one safe way to find out, I thought. I wrote out a small check to cash - - fifty credits. Went to one of the many tellers, handed it through the cage. I knew, of course, that my picture was automatically taken as I did so.

The teller glanced curiously at the check, stamped it, and without hesitation handed me a fifty credit note.

I was elated. The bank had not yet been notified. I returned to the counter and wrote out a check in my own name to one hundred twenty-five thousand credits.

I presented it to another teller.

"Your identification, please?"

I flashed my wrist band.

The teller studied the check minutely. "This is a considerable sum. More than I have at my window. Could you wait for just a moment?" He picked up his phone.

A bank guard tapped me on the shoulder.

"Could you come with me, please."

My impulse was to run. A paralyzer pistol was sheathed in his wrist holster. There was no use.

I followed him to the original teller's window.

"I'm sorry, sir," said the man, "but an estop has been put on this account. You will have to return the fifty credits."

"Certainly," I said, hastily whipping out the fifty. I wanted to dash for the door. Out of the corner of my eye I saw the other teller hang up his phone and look about urgently. He had not yet seen me.

"Here is the invalidated check," said the teller. "I suggest you hold onto it."

"Thank you," I said, restraining my hand from grabbing. "Guard," I said; "there's a teller over there motioning for you." I pointed in the opposite direction from the second teller. "I think it's number 16 there."

He went his way. I went my way, as fast as one can in a bank building without starting a chase. I hurried through the doors, wav-

ing frantically for a coptercab. One descended.

"Where to?"

Good question. "Fly me over the islands. I have to kill some time."

WE ASCENDED. I could just about read the cabbie's mind. "These damn Competitors! So busy and so loaded they have to spend money to kill time." We waited towards the lakefront. My own thoughts were swirling chaotically. I felt as though someone had turned off the degravity device just as I was stepping into the elevator shaft. The rug—no, the entire floor itself—had been yanked out from under me. I knew now that I was being pursued systematically. It was not yet noon, not yet two hours since the event. Already the subtle, confident, overpowering resources of the state had been brought to bear, narrowing the avenues of escape, cutting off the criminal's life-line. Yet what had made me an outlaw? Love of offspring?

"Do you want me to just keep circling?" said the cabbie.

I made a quick decision. "Board of Trade Building. I'll show you which entrance when we get there."

My office was located there. Undoubtedly it would be under close watch. Probably Charlie Spackler's was also. But I had to

communicate with Charlie. Had to get some money. Had to arrange to get out of the country.

In my mind's eye I could visualize two plainclothesmen seated in the anteroom of the firm of Sponsor & Spacker, trying to appear like clients. I could see another detective or two, armed with photograph and paralyzer, keeping vigilance on the roof landing. A few more watching the ground level entrance.

It was hard for me to believe I was that important to the state, worth a platoon of human bloodhounds. And yet, if the state was doing a thorough job at all, one had to assume they were there, and at our home in Mason City, Iowa, and at my club, and at all the space and air terminals as well. But it did not seem likely to me that a detective would actually be sitting in my private office, at my desk, waiting for me to come in through the window. That was the chance I'd have to take.

We approached the massive Board of Trade Building, which resembled the glued-together pipes of an antique pipe-organ, and I pointed and said to the cabbie,

"See that balcony. Let me off there."

The driver stared back at me, wide-eyed. "We aren't allowed to

do that, mister."

"I realize that," I said, handing him a twenty credit note. "But I want to play a joke on a friend."

"All right, buddy," he said, maneuvering his copter closer to the building. "Remember, if you land on the pavement below, I don't offer any guarantees."

He hovered stationary beside my balcony and I leaped across the air space of two or three feet and slipped and clung, and finally scrambled to safety.

I could see into my darkened office. It didn't look as if anyone was there. Then a new problem presented itself. How to open the unbreakable strontium-alloy window? There was no way at all to do it from the outside.

Why hadn't I thought of that!

I looked down sixty-eight stories, and looked up forty-one stories, and realized I was trapped.

Unless I could reach the balcony outside Charlie's office. Oh my God, I thought—a human fly act! That was ten feet away, and I am six-foot-one tall. Moreover, the wind was blowing in the wrong direction. And the face of the building was perfectly smooth. Not a thing to use as a hand-hold.

There was another possibility. I took off one of my shoes and hurled it at Charlie's window. It missed, but fortunately remained

on the balcony. I took off the other one. It struck his window with a dull clonk.

If Charlie was out of his office —. Well, I couldn't be any more in a jam without shoes than with shoes.

A face appeared at the window. Our secretary Claire. She peered out for an instant, but the angle was too extreme for her to see me waving crazily. As she disappeared I let out an anguished shout. She reappeared, pressed the window lever, and stuck her head outside.

"Mr. Sponsor!" she said in amazement.

"Is Spacker there?" I had no time to dwell on the situation.

"No, Mr. Sponsor, he's still in the pit." A frown crossed her forehead. "But there are some gentlemen—waiting to see you."

"Yes, I know about them. Now, Claire. Come into my office through the adjoining door and open this window. And first please reach out and get my shoes."

She smiled, and I too had to see the humor.

Claire was a pretty-faced brunette with ultra-fair complexion and a tendency towards overweight which kept her eating prescriptions instead of meals. She couldn't compete with our robot steno, but customers like to deal with a human being. And she was loyal.

She let me in and handed me my shoes.

I sat down, put them on. "Those men outside are not to know I'm here." This was the real test of her loyalty.

Claire nodded tersely. She was not a dumb girl.

"I'm in serious trouble, Claire. The less you know about it the better, but it's all tied up with the crisis on Venus. Were you able to book passage for me?"

"Yes, you've a reservation on the midnight rocket."

"Good! When's your lunch hour?"

"I'm on it now, Mr. Sponsor."

"Will you do me a tremendous favor, Claire? I know it's an imposition, but it's quite urgent. Would you go down to the Venus Spaceship Line and pick up that ticket for me? And while you're at it, get two more tickets on the same ship, but separated from me. Do you understand? Have them bill us as usual."

"Under what name, Mr. Sponsor?" She was a canny girl.

"Leave all three open under our company name." This wasn't much better than 'Mr. & Mrs. Bart Sponsor & Son', but it left us some leeway to juggle identities. Perhaps trade tickets with three shlubs at the last minute. "I hope you don't mind this imposition." I ad-

ded.

"I'll be very glad to do this for you, Mr. Sponsor." She hesitated. "Do you want me to bring the tickets back to the office? What should I do with them if you've left in the meantime?"

These were knowledgeable questions. How much did she already know? Was Claire really loyal, or was she planning already to tip off the police? Have them trail me, trap Celia and Freddie as well? That was one of those unavoidable risks.

"Mmm. Good question, Claire. Leave them in an envelope at the mail desk of the Conrad-Palmer Hotel . . . under my name."

Hell, I thought. If she's going to betray me, the name won't make any difference. Otherwise, I'll need my own name for identification, in order to pick up the envelope.

THEY HAD NOT gotten around to examining my personal files. The drawers were still locked, and my slim, antique missile-gun was still filed under "W" (for weapon). I slipped it into my pocket and began rifling through my papers. I had never, to be truthful, expected to be in a situation as bad as this. But Top Competitors have to be prepared for some rough tactics.

Under "I" was a set of false

identity papers. Under "S" was a sleep bomb - - strenuously outlawed in private hands. Under "B" were various blackmail letters, including one I secretly held over Spacker. I looked hopefully under "M" for money, but there my foresight had failed me. It had never occurred to me that a man with a quarter of a million in the bank, and three times as much in securities, would some day need money.

I did find something under "M" that made me pause. Mendelsohn. It was a yellowed old folder, certainly the oldest in the entire file. My thoughts suddenly swirled back to college days. This was a project we had worked up together, when Solly was still hot on soil chemistry, and I hadn't settled on anything definite except somehow making a fortune. This was a technique for creating tillable topsoil out of solid rock in ten short years. About a million times faster than nature could do it, but who wanted to wait ten years?

Not I, at least. And when I, who was to do the selling, cooled off on the idea, Solly lost interest too.

Intriguing, though. Maybe Solly would like it back. Maybe the poor shlub could use it on Primus Gladus. I began stuffing things in my briefcase.

Charlie Spacker returned. I could hear him enter the adjoin-

ing office. I gave him time to settle down at his desk, then made my appearance.

"Bart!" He was genuinely startled. Charlie was a heavy-set, muscular man with deep resonant voice, short-cut wiry hair, and ruggedly sculptured Roman features. He was a good bargainer by instinct, a rough competitor within established ground rules, but weak on the frontiers, slow to assimilate new ideas, fearful of decisions.

"You've been a long time in returning, Charlie. I've waited here almost an hour. The gentlemen outside are growing impatient."

Charlie was confused. "They know you're here?"

"How do you think I got in? Through the window?"

"But I thought you were in serious trouble. Beach called and said -"

"I know all about that. Beach is behind the time, and he's not getting any more of our business, do you understand?" I had been speaking harshly. Now I fell into the familiar friendly vein. "Charlie, this is the situation. I came within an inch of getting my head chopped off. But I spoke to the Central Committeeman, and the matter's being straightened out."

I paced the office casually. "It's costing me money, of course. A cool half-million."

Charlie's eyes grew to the first magnitude. "Canopus! Have you got that much?"

"Not quite. Not in cash, anyway. There are some securities I can't put on the market right now. So I'm a hundred thousand short. Which isn't so much, actually."

I had to make this sound completely nonchalant. "I thought I'd borrow it from the business for thirty days. I assume that's all right with you?"

Spacker is no fool either. He hesitated. "Well sure, Bart, if we have it. But you know, with this Venus crisis we're running pretty close."

I exploded. "What do you mean, 'if we have it'! Our assets top thirty million."

"You weren't in the pit this morning, Bart. The way Venus commodities are going, we'll be damn lucky to cover our commitments."

"That bad? Well, it's a good thing I'm leaving for Venus tonight." I paused. "All right, Charlie, then make me a personal loan."

"I'd be glad to, Bart. But . . . considering the circumstances, how can I be sure you'll come back from Venus?" Spacker was shrewd.

"Don't be absurd, Charlie." I tried to make light of his bulls-eye. "If that bothers you, I'll give

you two-for-one in government series R as collateral."

Spacker shook his head. "If something should go wrong with this deal you've made, then the government will be able to reclaim them as forfeit. And I'll be out a hundred thousand."

I WAS SWALLOWING the humiliation, frustrated with a rage that I had to conceal. I was furious at his lack of trust, and chagrined that he was so well justified.

"All right, Charlie," I said cordially. "I'm a little hurt by your suspiciousness, but you have me at a disadvantage. I need the money. I suppose I could raise it some other way, but then that would delay my departure for Venus. And you know that our mutual welfare is tied up with the trip.

"If so many things worry you about this personal transaction, let me put your mind at ease. I'll sign over my equity in the business as security for the loan. Is that good enough?"

Charlie was now his best competitive self. "Look at it from my point of view, Bart. If you didn't return, the business would become all mine anyway. Isn't that right?" A bland look of innocence spread over his face, a mask concealing

the saturnine smile. "Bart, I suggest you delay your trip for a day or so. Raise the money some other way."

I held back long enough to believe my ears. Then I drew my gun. "You bastard!"

"You can't force me to sign! I'd repudiate it by phone the minute you left!"

"I'll kill you!"

"That won't get you the money. You'll rot in the slave-mines of Mercury!"

True. A feeling of fatalism swept over me like ocean surf. I opened Spacker's door and called out to the detectives:

"If you gentlemen will step in here, we've just received word of Mr. Sponsor's whereabouts."

Then I stepped back behind the door jamb, leveling the gun at Spacker. He knew I meant silence. He knew I would kill.

The detectives entered. I jumped behind them. "Raise your hands!"

They complied.

"You too, Spacker. Now, the three of you turn your backs to me and walk to the wall. Keep those hands high!"

I opened my briefcase with one hand, withdrew the sleep bomb, hurled it at their feet. The detectives knew what it was after one gasp, and tried to hold their breath. But one gasp is enough. They

crumpled to the floor, unconscious. I closed Spacker's door and hung up the 'Do Not Disturb' sign.

Our robot secretary was taking a flurry of phone messages. I waited patiently in the anteroom till Claire returned.

"Here they are," she said soberly, handing me the envelope. "Three berths on the *Sophocles*."

"That's wonderful, Claire! Thanks a lot. By the way, you'll notice that those gentlemen have left. The matter is all straightened out."

A smile wreathed her face. "I'm very happy for you, Mr. Sponsor."

"In celebration, you know what we're going to do? We're going to give you the rest of the day off!"

She was enthralled. I waited until five minutes after she'd left, then walked briskly to the down-shaft.

I had to assume there were detectives posted at the main floor entrance. And on the roof. And even perhaps in the freight entrance. I got off on the second floor.

I walked down the corridor, studying the signs on doorways. There was a market research firm, Mechlen Drew Inc., that occupied a large suite, with several labeled doors. I opened one that said 'Employees' and found myself in a room with a medium-sized computer and several preoccupied ma-

thematicians.

I went directly and purposefully to the window, opened it, and calculated the distance to ground level. Twelve feet maybe. The employees looked at me with faint interest. Someone from the building maintenance department, probably.

For a minute or two I watched the pedestrians glide by on the conveyor belt. I saw no evidence of the police.

"I think I'll have to examine this from the outside," I said to the employees. "Will one of you close the window after me?"

I got out on the sill, eased my body down, hung by my fingertips for a moment, then let go. I could see a puzzled expression at the window as I glided away and became lost in pedestrian cross-traffic.

In a mood of self-congratulation, I headed for the Art Institute. The mood vanished as I passed the first newsstand. Boldly on its display screen was a front page story about the fugitive Sponsor family. There were pictures, of course. They didn't have a very good one of Celia. College graduation shot. She had nothing to worry about. The photo of Freddie was better, but the city is full of skinny seven-year-olds with sensitive features. No great risk of recognition there.

But the one of me! A perfect

likeness. Repeated on an endless number of newsstands between the Board of Trade Building and the museum. The large, oval-shaped bald head, shorn of all but a trace of sideburns. The straight, prominent nose with flaring nostrils. The large, sensual lips. The hard-clamped jaw.

Thanking Zeus for Chicago's anonymous millions, I entered the quietly thronged Art Institute.

CELIA AND FREDDIE were looking at paintings of the Prismatic school, without much enthusiasm, when I found them. Their greeting made me feel like a hero.

"Daddy!" said Freddie, hitting my leg joyfully as Celia embraced me with a passionate kiss.

"It's one-thirty," said Celia softly, aching. "We were so worried."

"Let's go eat," I suggested, suddenly aware of hunger pangs.

"We already have, but it'll be much nicer this time."

We went to the tea room. Alongside was the sunken garden, with its dwarf trees and moist green grass and bubbling waterfall. Three or four pieces of ancient sculpture - - smooth white marble of the Greeks - stood in the garden on pedestals. Somehow these had survived the destruction.

"Nothing else remained of the whole collection," said Celia sadly. "Renoirs, Rembrandts, Raphaels - - all, all gone."

"I'm tired, mommy. Why can't we go home now?"

"After a while, dear. Poor kid! He's weary of looking at pictures, and so am I."

"Freddie," I asked, "why didn't you like to play games with the other children at school?" Celia glanced at me disapprovingly.

"Oh, I like to play games. But . . . it just seems that when everyone's trying so hard to win . . . it spoils the fun. You know."

"Leave him alone, Bart."

I finished my ersatz soup and my synthetic sandwich, and drank down a cup of chemical coffee, and felt much better.

Freddie napped on one of the garden benches, and that was a good thing for him and for us. We had to talk, weigh alternatives, make plans.

"The real crisis," I said, "is at five o'clock when this place closes. Then we have to get into our ship and fly somewhere. Wherever we go there'll be police looking for a green Cad Super with Iowa license plates."

"We have one advantage at that time," said Celia. "Rush hour. If you can stay in the thick of traffic . . . and not hedge-hop."

"Don't worry!"

"The real crisis, I think, is when we board the Venus ship," said Celia. "The police will be watching all departures, checking identities, just as a matter of routine."

"That's true, but we don't go aboard as a threesome. You and Freddie earlier. And I at the last minute, with false identity papers."

Celia shook her head as if warding off an unpleasant thought. "Aren't you afraid that when Spacker wakes up he'll tell them about the Venus ship?"

"According to my information, the sleep bomb knocks you out for ten or eleven hours. A doctor can bring you out of it a little sooner, but you still don't regain your full senses right away."

"Even allowing ten hours, Bart. One and ten is eleven. Our ship leaves at twelve o'clock. That means we face one hour of supreme risk."

She was right, of course. And there was one more source of anxiety that I thought it best not to mention. Claire. What would Claire say if she found out about the sleep bomb? If she went back to the office for any reason this afternoon? Or if the police found out in some manner? Surely they would go looking for the detectives. Surely they would question Claire. What would she tell them?

FIVE O'CLOCK. Exit separately through the rear door to the parking lot.

First Celia, walking briskly, with keys to the car in her gloved hand. Unaware how I stare at her handsome figure, voluptuous movements of hip and thigh. How akin the awareness of danger and awareness of sex!

She opens the car door, turns the ignition key, idles the engine.

Next, Freddie, as well coached as possible. Unhurried, lackadaisical. Taking a slow, wandering path, oblivious of the peril, curious about the other cars, taking his time.

He reaches our car and Celia scoops him up, and I see him clamber over the front seat and bury himself in the back.

Then I, striding heavily, hastily. Briefcase in hand. Looking neither right nor left. Lowering chin almost onto chest. Waiting for a voice behind me. Expecting a shout: 'Wait! Stop!'

I reach our car, jump in, slam the door, open the throttle. We ascend. Circle into the lowest, slowest, most congested local traffic lane, westward bound over Chicago.

I DIDN'T MUCH like Celia's suggestion. But I couldn't think of a better one. And we had to spend the next five or six hours some-

where.

"So why not the Mendelshons?" said Celia. "It's a little early for their party, but I'm sure we'll be welcome."

"All right. But we've got to keep quiet about our . . . troubles. I don't want that shlub to have the last laugh on me."

It was an evening in early fall, and the sun was setting, but not fast enough for my comfort. I craved the protection of darkness. We already had passed two police cars headed eastward, and each time I cringed helplessly, and Celia and Freddie ducked down out of sight. Possibly the red sunset tones were falsifying the green of our car. Otherwise, I can't see how they overlooked us.

Traffic was starting to thin out as we arrived over the Mendota district of Chicago. This was kind of a marginal area - - no longer desirable, not yet slum - - where respectable poor people maintained some semblance of pride in their old dilapidated solar-heated homes. It was an area so thick with grime and industrial soot, that I had a hard time making out the roof markers from two-hundred feet. The glass and concrete dwellings were universally alike in pattern, a hollow square with patio in the center. Yet despite the general poverty below, I failed to see a

single house that didn't have a rattletrap aircar of some kind parked in the rear. All except the Mendelsohn house. The Mendelsohns never owned a car. They had turned their backyard into a vegetable garden.

"Think they'll mind if I land there?"

"Not when they're leaving tomorrow."

I landed gently; nevertheless. Solly was sensitive about plants.

I think they were really astonished to see us. The girls ran into each other's embrace with squeals of recognition. Solly and I shook hands with a good deal more restraint. Dolores was tossing Freddie's hair. Then we went into their house.

It was pretty bare, of course. They had packed most of their things; probably had them stored aboard ship by now. But there was enough furniture left that went with the house for us to sit down on.

"How wonderful! How wonderful of you to come and see us!" said Dolores. She was a tall, dark, big-breasted girl with classical features in the Byzantine sense. Her hair was black, her movements languid, her voice deep and melodious.

"We couldn't see you go to the stars without saying goodbye," said

Celia.

"We talked about you so often," Dolly said. "Wondering how you were. What you were doing."

I found it hard to imagine this exotic, beautiful woman transplanted to an alien world in the role of pioneer farmgirl.

"We've thought about you too," said Celia. "So many times."

It was awkward. Solly and I hadn't exchanged more than five words.

"Would you like some refreshments?" said Dolly. "Drinks? Something to eat?" She smiled at me and smiled at Freddie, and nodded yes until Freddie nodded with her.

"Sure you do," she said.

We laughed. Dolly stood up. "We weren't expecting our guests for another hour, but everything's ready."

She and Celia and Freddie went into the kitchen.

I hated to be left alone with Solly, and I suppose the feeling was reciprocal.

"Are you glad to be going?" I inquired neutrally.

"Very."

"How long does it take to get there?"

"Two and a half years."

"That's a long time!"

"Not considering the distance. Primus Gladus is nine-tenths of a

light-year away."

"Funny," I said, "a star being that close, undiscovered until this century,"

"It's not a bright star. Half the luminosity of our sun. For all we know, there may be others just as close." Solly meditated on the idea.

"I suppose that's possible," I said. "Must be thousands of stars in the southern skies - - faint stars, I mean - - that haven't been measured."

We were both silent. There seemed nothing further to say. The distance was as far between us as between Sol and Primus Gladus. I fumbled in my briefcase.

"This is something that may interest you, Solly." I handed him the folder containing his topsoil project. "Found it in my file just this afternoon. Thought maybe you could use it where you're going."

He looked at it. His forehead wrinkled in a frown.

"Remember?" I cued him. "College days?"

A LIGHT CAME into his eyes from a source thousands of light-years away. "Oh yes," he uttered slowly, a faint smile touching the corners of his mouth. "That was our big business venture. The Topsoil Initiator." He looked at me peculiarly. "Bart, how come

you kept it all these years?"

"I always thought it was a good idea." This was not a lie. "But why," I said, "haven't *you* done anything with it?"

"O-o-o-h," he drawled, "no drive, I guess. The real reason, I guess, is that I never had enough money to buy a barren, rocky acre where I could give it a practical tryout."

"Ten years seems like such a long time to wait for results," I said.

Solly reflected with that faint remembering smile on his lips. "It did then."

The girls returned with food and drink, and somehow Solly and I had warmed up over the topsoil recollection, and we all became quite gay and animated and loud-talking, and I suppose it was a little like old times.

Then a little while later Celia took her purse in the other room, and when she came out she handed Dolores an envelope.

I knew what was in it, and I wanted to shout, 'My God, don't do it! That's all the money we have in the world!' But I couldn't get the words out, and Celia said:

"Dolly, here is something for you from us. It's a going-away present. We want you to have it before the others come."

"How nice," said Dolly. "What

can it be?"

She opened the envelope, and a mixed expression played across her face - - delight and dismay.

"Why, it's money! . . . A lot of money! . . . Thousands!"

She turned her head away in reluctance, then handed back the envelope.

"Oh, no, Celia. We couldn't accept it."

Celia refused to take it back. "Oh now, Dolly," she snapped, "don't be stuffy and proud and stupid! We have millions. We *want* you to have it. You certainly need it; you can't deny that. So please accept it and make us happy."

"It's wonderful of you both," said Solly. "But you know how it is. We just can't."

"We just can't," repeated Dolly.

"Oh please, please," cried Celia, and she was really getting emotional. "Don't you realize. This is the last time we'll ever see you! You're going to a far-away world, our two dearest friends. And this may seem like a lot of money, but it really isn't. It's all the gifts and presents we would give you in a lifetime, rolled up into one. It's funny little baby clothes when your children are born. It's anniversary gifts. It's for your boy's bar mitzvah and your daughter's confirmation. It's wedding presents when they grow up. It's - - it's funeral

wreaths!"

Celia started to cry, and Dolly started to cry, and they hugged each other and started to cry even more, and the tears rolled down their cheeks. And the tears rolled down my cheeks, and Solly's too, I guess, and we shook hands very solemnly. And Celia stuffed the envelope into Dolly's hand. And then all of us really cut loose and bawled - - I covering my face with my hands, and Solly burying his face in a handkerchief. Only Freddie wasn't crying at first. He was just standing there looking bewildered. And then he got scared and started to cry too, hanging onto my pants leg with one hand, and trying to reach Celia with the other.

And then, thank God, the first guests arrived, ringing the bell, so that we had a compelling reason to stop.

THE PARTY WAS STILL going strong when we left at eleven. Solly and Dolly walked us out to our car. There really wasn't much left to say. We had found each other in friendship again, and would never again be nearer than nine-tenths of a light-year.

"A pity!" said Solly, and I knew what he meant.

The evening was very cool. Celia began to shiver. We took off, and

the cabin heater warmed up the thermometer, but still we felt cold. Freddie sat in the front seat between us, dozing lightly.

Our Cad Super roared through the night. Even at full power, Spaceport, Nevada, was thirty minutes away. The moon set rapidly. The night grew darker.

"I fear that we will be caught," said Celia tonelessly, like a voice dissociated from body.

Our ship's nose wavered slowly between Procyon and Pollux, Canis Minor and Gemini, back and forth, droning on in the blackness.

"I fear for our little boy," said Celia like a soul lost in a maze of warped space. "What will they do to him?"

"They'll never lay hands on him," I said softly.

The Serpent writhed and Char-ioteer rocked as Twins duelled the Crab and Hunter pursued Bull.

"That was a fine gesture you made," Celia whispered.

"What?"

"Giving them the money. I'm proud of you."

The lights of Spaceport glowed on the horizon. It was a vast complex of launching sites, covering a hundred square miles. But only one ship could blast off at a time, and that ship would be flooded by searchlights. I singled out the Venus rocket and we descended.

It was eleven-thirty-two. I handed Celia her two tickets.

As we approached the Venus compound I could see several police cars parked on the field. Passengers seemed to be leaving rather than entering the ship. The gangway was crowded with people pouring out of the spacelock.

"They're looking for us," I muttered.

"Is that why they're all getting off?" said Celia.

"They must be shaking down the entire ship."

"This is the moment I feared." She tightened her grip on Freddie.

"There must be a way of getting aboard!" I said.

We edged forward to the gates of the field.

"There is no way of getting aboard," said Celia. Her voice was hopeless. She motioned at a large bulletin board.

The sign read: VENUS FLIGHTS CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE BECAUSE OF CIVIL DISORDERS ON THAT PLANET.

I was weary and defeated, but I said, "Honey, we're not licked. We can still go to Australia."

"I have a better idea," Celia exclaimed. It was as though a new current of life, a new gusher of hope, had burst through the surface. "Let's go to Primus Gladus!"

IT WAS FOUR in the morning. We had told Solly and Dolly the straight story.

"Do you think we can get a berth on the ship?" my wife queried anxiously. "Is there any way you can help us?"

The Mendelsohns exchanged glances.

"I don't know," said Solly. "Truthfully. Let me think about it a few minutes."

"Since you've told us the truth about yourselves," said Dolly, "do you mind hearing some things you don't know about us?"

"All cards might as well be face up," I replied.

"Well listen, you two. It isn't easy to emigrate to another system. If you're a shlub, yes. But not if you're a soil chemist, or any other kind of scientist or advanced technician. Earth won't let the boys with know-how get out of its clutches." Dolly's eyes were burning with a message she only half-dared to communicate. "Does this give you any clues?" she asked, eagerly scanning our faces.

Suddenly the parts fit perfectly. "Solly! You did it deliberately. You washed out of school! You let your career fall to pieces. On purpose!"

Solly was nodding and smiling rather grimly.

"But why?" I demanded. "You

had such brilliant prospects here on Earth. Why did you do it?"

"Surely you of all people must know by now," said Dolly excitedly. "Can you and your family go on living in this kind of a world? Can you endure this police-state tyranny now that you know what it is? Can you accept the hypocrisy, the masquerade behind pious slogans? What is this thing they call Competition? Is it really good? Is it really the expression of democracy? Is it what they want or is it forced on them?"

"Dolly, you're asking more questions than you're answering," said Celia, trying to head her off.

"Or is it organized greed? Simple dog-eat-dog? The law of jungle cunning and brute force reaffirmed? If we must compete, let it not be as maggots swarming over a half-eaten pie! Let's get people to vie with one another in service to mankind!"

Dolly had worked herself into a kind of evangelical zeal, with Solly nodding hypnotically in agreement.

I answered calmly, trying not to strain our newly healed friendship. "I don't go along with you on some of the things you say, Dolly. I personally think competition is the mainspring of progress -"

Solly started to protest.

"- material progress," I added.

"Well, maybe," said Celia, and in a flash I could see what had gone wrong with Freddie's home life, from the school principal's point of view. "But I can't see what competitiveness has to do with creative art, or the pure sciences, or philosophy. I think it's positively destructive in those areas. The real struggle there is internal, not external. To me, competition is only a part of life not the whole of it."

"You're all wrong!" I shouted. "My only concern is with the welfare of Freddie. That's what got us into this predicament. I want you to understand that I'm for the system ninety-five per cent!"

Solly, Dolly, and Celia smiled. That irritated me but I let the matter drop.

"Let's consider what's to be done," I said.

"Yes," said Solly very seriously. "I can tell you this about the starship. On a voyage of two and a half years, nothing can be done haphazardly, at the last minute. Every berth has to be accounted for long in advance. Our baggage has been calculated down to the last ounce. The number of farming implements, the number of livestock - - even the number of children you may have en route! - - are strictly allocated."

"In other words, the only way

we can get aboard is if someone dies or doesn't show up at the last minute?" said Celia.

"Or if you can persuade someone not to make the trip."

"And in addition get by the police," I added softly.

AT SEVEN that morning the airbus stopped to pick up the Mendelsohns and their hand luggage. We had worked out some kind of half-baked plan that I didn't think would go over with the ship's officials. We set a rendezvous time and place and waved them off. Then we got into our Cad Super. For the second time it bore us west to Spaceport.

As we neared the field, Celia commented, "You know, darling, this car is pretty conspicuous in the daytime."

"I'm hungry, mommy," said Freddie who had missed out on breakfast altogether. Celia gave him a soggy hors d'oeuvre, which was all that was left from the Mendelsohn's party.

I had been thinking about what to do with our expensive car. I brought it down almost a mile from the star-ship *Pericles*.

"You two will have to walk the rest of the way," I said cheerily. "I'll meet you at our rendezvous point in about twenty-five minutes."

The time was now seven-thirty. The ship blasted off at nine. I put our car in a steep climb and circled the field at an altitude of ten thousand feet, where I could see which of the many spaceships were loading passengers.

I chose one ship arbitrarily at the opposite end of the field from the star-ship. It turned out to be an Asteroid surveyor, paying its way with a hundred or so passengers to Ganymede. I set down in the adjoining lot, and fixed the degravity controls so that the ship hovered a few inches off the ground, and left it that way to drift across the field with the wind until it attracted the inevitable attention.

I walked to the next shuttle bus stop and rode across to the *Pericles*. It was a gigantic ship, twenty times the capacity of a Venus or Mars rocket. Comet-shaped, engineered to approach fifty per cent of the speed of light through cumulative acceleration, the star-ship had two vast cargo entrances in addition to the passenger air-lock. In one, which was now closing, I caught sight of crated farm machinery. Into the other, herds of cattle were being driven.

It was nearly eight o'clock. I approached the *Pericles* warily. We were all supposed to meet by the livestock gate. Dozens of people

were milling about, some ranchers, some colonizers, bargaining at the last minute over a sheep or a goat or a horse or a cow to replace a dead or sick animal. That some of the men were detectives I did not doubt. I saw Celia close to the entrance with Freddie. We exchanged glances of recognition, but kept widely separated.

Solly came up. "I checked with the captain about Dolly and me waiving our right to have a child during the voyage, and taking Freddie with us instead. You were right. He wouldn't buy it."

"That was tremendously generous of you even to offer."

"But," said Solly, "there's been one cancellation!"

Our eyes met. "What's the fare?" I inquired.

"Two thousand." Solly looked down for a moment, then threw back his head. "Look, that's still your money, even if you did give it to us. Dolly and I are willing . . . would be happy to pay Freddie's fare. And take care of him as our own if you and Celia can't get on."

"My son has no future on Earth," I said. "If Celia's willing, I am. Go talk to her."

Solly went to Celia. She did not once look in my direction and I was glad. In the end, Freddie went with Solly, and I could tell

what the lie was. Solly was going to show Freddie the insides of the wonderful ship.

It was a quarter after eight. Only forty-five minutes before takeoff. Celia and I were going to be left behind. There didn't seem much reason for further pretense. I took my wife's hand.

"Little did we know how important your going-away present would be. Solly used two thousand of it to pay Freddie's fare."

Celia shook her head. "He didn't have to do that."

"Sweetheart, all we have left is about a hundred and fifty credits."

"That may be all *you* have left," she said proudly, "but that isn't all *we* have left. If my addition is correct, we have ninety thousand cash credits in my purse, right at this minute!"

"What! How do you mean?"

Celia put her arm in mine. "I played a dirty trick on you, darling. You signed and I added another zero."

"You took out a hundred thousand! No wonder that teller made such a fuss."

"Dear, I thought you might have to use a little bribery. I knew Freddie was in trouble, and that was my fault, of course. I'm the villain in his home-life!" She smiled ruefully, then looked at the *Pericles*, her eyes brimming with

tears. "But I had no idea they'd try to take him away from us!"

My thoughts pulsed wildly. "Look, Celia! We can both get aboard! Give me the money!" I took her purse and ran over to the huddle of colonizers.

"I've got ninety-thousand cash credits! Who'll give up his place on the *Pericles*?"

The group turned to face me in astonishment. One man came forward. I thought I saw a gun hidden in his sleeve. "Ninety-thousand?"

"That's right. Who wants it?"

"Ninety thousand is a small fortune," said the man, "Anyone with that kind of money shouldn't need to pull up stakes on Earth and start life all over again on a new planet. Should he?"

"I don't imagine so. Who'll take ninety thousand for his place on the *Pericles*?" I repeated over his shoulder.

"Unless he has some special, very compelling reason for leaving Earth," the stranger continued.

A COLONIZER RAN UP breathlessly. "Ninety thousand? Let me see it!"

I opened the purse, pulled out the wad of bills, and flung the purse on the ground.

The colonizer riffed through the wad. "That's for me! I'll take it!"

He reached for the money.

"Just a minute," I said. "It's yours after you give that lady over there your berth and make it legal with the ship."

"Hey," said a companion, "how about all your belongings? Your cattle and equipment? You haven't time any more to take it off."

"Heck, my whole outfit isn't worth more than fifteen thousand! I'll give it to the lady."

He ran to Celia and the two of them dashed for the passenger ramp. It was eight-thirty-five. Twenty-five minutes before take-off.

I put the money in my coat pocket.

"I don't think," said the stranger, "that this transaction is going through." He stepped so close we were almost jaw to jaw. "Let me see your identity tag."

"Who are you trying to impersonate?" I said.

"A common ordinary rancher," he replied, flashing his badge. "Now let's see your identification."

"Certainly." I showed him my false wrist tag.

"Donald Simpson, I see." He stared at me through narrowed eyes. "Where did you find that, Mr. Sponsor?"

"Sponsor? Is that the guy you're looking for? I have about a dozen other documents to prove I'm Simp-

son. If you have the patience to look at them."

I opened the briefcase and handed him the packet. They had cost me thousands and they were awfully good forgeries. They slowed the detective down quite a bit.

"Why are you offering that kind of money to get the lady on board?"

"Because I'm awfully anxious to get rid of her."

"You didn't happen to put a kid aboard that ship too, for the same reason?"

"If you think I did, why don't you go look?"

"I may do that, mister. You know, we can hold this ship on the field for an hour or more if we think it would prove profitable."

I saw Celia waving from the passenger gangway, and the colonizer came sprinting our way.

"It's done!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "Let's have the money."

I reached into my pocket.

The detective laid his hand on my arm. "I said I didn't think this transaction was going through." He turned to the colonizer. "You'd better switch things back to the way they were."

"No," I said, pressing the gun through my coat pocket into the belly of the detective, "don't pay any attention to this character." I crossed over with my other hand

and withdrew the money.

"Take this," I said to the colonizer, "and get out of here. Fast as you can!"

He was confused but not on basic things. He took his money and virtually ran.

Ten minutes to nine.

They were closing up the passenger airlock, removing the ramp.

"You know," said the detective very quietly, "my buddy is coming. He won't understand this embrace we're in. I'm quite sure he won't like it one bit."

The last of the animals were being led into the livestock hold. The ranchers were dispersing. The colonizers were all aboard. We stood virtually alone beside the ship.

"I am prepared to be killed," I said, "and to take you with me in the process."

A police car hovered in the air beside us.

"Say!" yelled its pilot. "They've found the Sponsor car over next to the Astéroid surveyor!" He pointed across the field. "They're searching the ship. We've got to help. Hop on!"

I stepped back, with my hand still in my pocket.

"Yes," I said, "hop on!"

The detective clambered aboard the police car. He gave me a look that I'll always remember. A sort

of sneer and a sort of smile. "Good luck, Simpson," he said.

The police car whisked away.

Five minutes to nine.

I wheeled and ran to the livestock hold. The hatch was about shut and I knew it was too late. 'Goodbye, my darlings! Goodbye!'

Then the hatch jammed and could not close the last six inches and I saw the reason. A steer had broken loose and charged the door. His head was caught in the opening. His neck had snapped instantly and he was dead.

They re-opened the hatch long enough to fling the thousand-

pound carcass onto the field. And that was all the time I needed to come aboard.

A crew member hollered at me: "Do you belong here?"

"Yes," I replied, "I certainly do."

As I said it, the ship blasted heavenward and I was flung to the deck. I started to curse, and then I chuckled. I was stretched out ignominiously beside a cow in the fresh-smelling hay.

I, Bart Sponsor, Top Competitor, starting a new life. This way!

Well Solly, I mused, understand the planet we're going to has lots of rocky acres.

THE END



Multiple Worlds



IT turns out that the much touted satellite which we shall soon see in the sky during the Geophysical Year is only a forerunner of others to come—and shortly. In fact a whole program is being set up with the specific intention of (within years—not decades) of putting manned vehicles in the Heavens.

Sanguinary science evidently sees no deterrent to the human occupancy of a satellite; a clue to the fact that radiation at high altitudes may be non-lethal after all, though for a long time it was suspected that this might be the barrier. Now scientists are quite frank in admitting that the major barriers to

Lunar flight as well as the Space Station are just fuels and metals for engines—nothing else.

It is not an exaggeration to conclude that by 1980, there will be several dozen permanent satellites in the sky with work well under way on the Space Station. Another clue to this conclusion is the success of the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile program which, when looked at from the long view, is practical rocketry at its best. From these missiles will come the rockets we need. Von Braun is, in a sense, getting his desired "crash program." The sky will soon be full of moons...

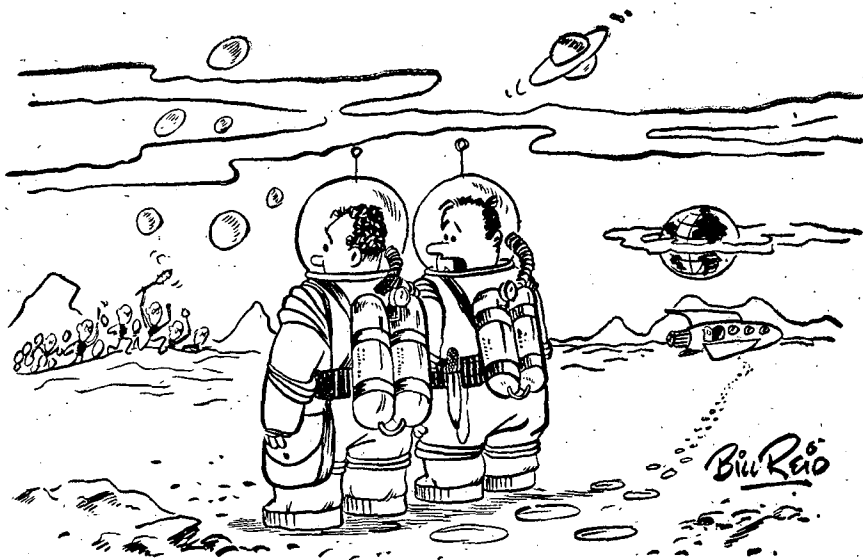
★ Linear Programming ★

A LONG with the "Theory of Games," and with "Operational Analysis," mathematics is contributing a new and practical technique, which though unknown to most of us, is filtering into our affairs.

"Linear programming" as the technique is called, is the mathematical way of using a complex machine or process in the best possible way. In this respect it is a variant of operational analysis and in fact stems from that subject. The most mundane fields of

activity have found the method useful. Such problems as employing a strip-mining power shovel most effectively when it must remove top-soil, or the proper use of employees in a department store—these things are solved by linear programming despite the apparent impossibility of considering the enormous number of variables involved.

Linear programming commonly uses computing machines, "mechanical brains" to solve problems, but the mathematician remains master.



"They don't look friendly — we better start trying to run!"

The Man Who Made Himself

by

Charles Beaumont

Pete Nolan knew everything about his past life up to the present; but the trouble was he couldn't find anybody to verify his existence!

“**I** WAITED, MISTER,” the old woman said. “For thirty years; yes sir.” she smelled of hospital corridors, pressed ferns, dust: age had devoured her. Now there was nothing left, except the eyes which flashed.

The tall young man did not smile. His hands were almost fists, but the fingers were loose.

“All my life, since I was a little girl, can you imagine? Then it came, out of a clear sky, while I was ironing. Ironing on a Sunday, God save me. It came.”

“What did?” the man said, because he had to say something, he couldn't just walk away or ignore her.

“The good Lord's Own sweet breath, that's what,” the old woman said. “Like an electricity shock. I was revelated. Praise God, Mister, and praise His good works.”

The man looked quickly away. The station was deserted. Its floor sparkled fiercely and this gave the impression of movement, but there was no movement. And there was no sound, either, except for the miles away roar of the train, and the old woman's voice, whispering and whispering.

Please, lady!

“Mister, I wonder if you'd tell me something.”

The young man did not answer. *Please!*

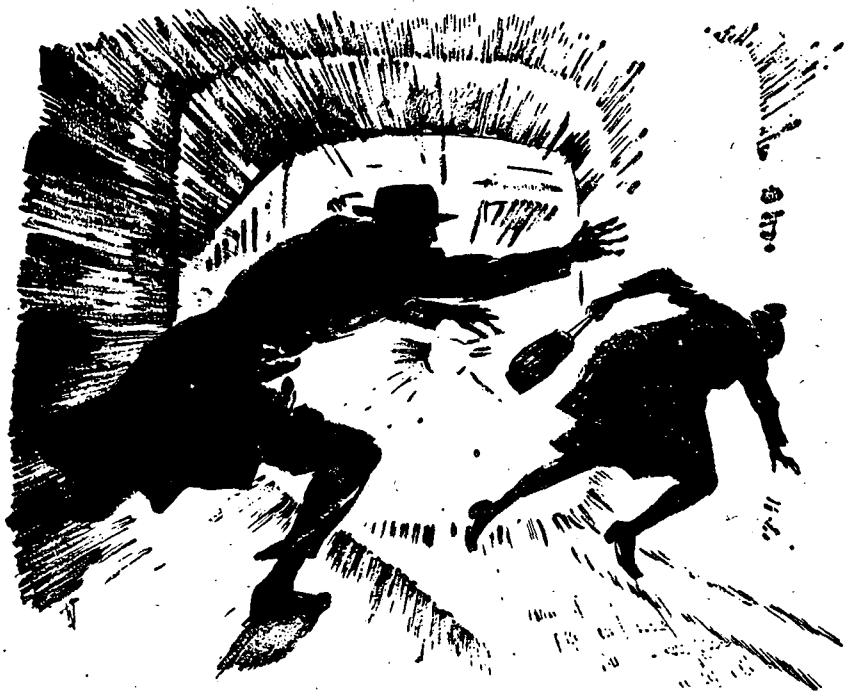
“Do you read the book?” She cocked her head and arched and smiled.

“What book is that, ma'am?”

“Why,” her eyes blinked, “the good book, of course.”

His fingers laced together, tightly. “Yes,” he told her. “All the time.”

She nodded, then raised one hand. It was thin and the flesh was trans-



parent. "You're sure you're telling the truth now? We may be a mile underground, but He hears *every word.*"

"It's the truth."

Suddenly the old woman leaned forward. Her face was sharp bones and dry flesh and tiny white hairs. "All right," she said. "All right." The smile altered. Then, almost hissing: "Liviticus; Chapter Five; Verse Two!"

Where are the people!

"Well?" She was clucking her tongue. "Well, Mister?"

The young man rose from the bench and walked to the edge of the platform. In either direction there was darkness. He stood there, watching the darkness, listening to the growing thunder of the train.

It's got to come. It's got to come soon!

The old woman's shoes rang along the cement. She looked feeble and very small. About her shoulders an orange fox lay curled, its head beneath her chin, its eyes beady with cunning.

Train!

"Or if a soul touch any unclean thing, whether *it be* a carcass of an unclean beast, or a carcass of unclean cattle, or the carcass of unclean creeping things, and *if* it be hidden from him; he also shall be unclean, and guilty.' "

"Go away."

"Mister," the old woman said. She reached out and touched the young man's arm. It was hard and well-muscled, as the rest of him was.

He jerked away. "Leave me alone!"

"You want His infinite love, don't you?"

"No, goddamn it, no," he shouted. "Please, lady, get away from me."

"He forgives His sheep, Mister. Maybe you're afraid it's too late but you're wrong." She moved in front of the young man. "We are all His lambs . . ."

Her words became lost in the hollow roar, growing.

Jess!

The single headlight appeared, an immense, blinding circle of sharp brilliance.

The old woman's hands were fluttering. She blinked behind thick lenses and opened and closed her cracking lips.

The first car appeared.

The young man pulled his head around. The station was still de-

serted. It sang piercingly, and trembled, and shook loose flaming splinters of pain.

The old woman had stopped talking.

She stood there, smiling.

The young man took a step backwards and put his hands about the old woman's shoulders.

Her eyes widened.

He waited; then, as the Express burst out of the blackness; its dark metal tons lurching and jolting along the tracks, he released his hold and pushed.

The old woman fell over the edge of the platform.

"Good-bye, Walter!"

The train scooped her up and flattened her against the headlight and held her there for half an instant like a giant moth. Then she came loose.

The young man turned around and ran up the stairs.

Outside, the streets were crowded . . .

THE DOOR was opened to the length of its chain by a girl who was mostly shadow.

Peter Nolan put his hands behind his back and smiled. "Well, ma'am," he said, "see, I'm a member of the Junior Woodchucks - -"

"The. what?"

" - - and all I got to do is sell one more subscription to get my genuine toy dial typewriter.

What do you say?"

The girl said, "No," and closed the door.

Then she opened it again. "Hi, Pete."

"Hi." He stepped inside. The apartment was thick with heat. Through the drawn shades he could see the beginnings of sunlight. "Ready?" he said.

"And willing," the girl said. "Are you disappointed?"

"Just a little surprised." He put his hand on the back of the girl's neck and pulled gently. He kissed her.

"Pete! I've told you, there are lines I just don't cross."

"I was going to wait till after we got married, but then I figured what the hell." He touched her nose.

She wriggled out of his arms. "How come so late?"

"What am I, three minutes off schedule?"

"That's close. You miss by only half an hour."

He walked over to the couch, lay down, and groaned theatrically. "I keep telling you to get rid of that sun dial!"

"Okay, so you overslept," the girl said. "God knows leaving at six o'clock wasn't *my* idea."

He lit a cigarette. "I did not oversleep. I left the hotel at four-thirty A.M., got on a subway, got off the subway, and came directly

here. Therefore - - "

"Therefore, you're nuts. It's now five past six."

He sat upright, pulled back his coatsleeves, glared at a small Benrus.

"Don't worry about it, dear," she said, patting his knee. "I'm just glad I found out now."

She sniffed. "Oh-oh."

"Oh-oh what?"

"I think I smell the maid burning." She rushed across the room and into the kitchen. "You said you wanted to bring some food along, didn't you?"

"Sure."

"So I roasted us a chicken. We can have sandwiches."

He rose and walked into the kitchen. "You," he said, "are only the wildest."

She did not turn around.

He leaned against the refrigerator. "I know what you mean," he said. "It's too good."

"No." Jess did busy things with the chicken. "It's just that I'm happy - - understand? And that's enough to give any girl the creeps this day and age."

He watched her work and was quiet for a while. Then he said, "Maybe you ought to change your mind."

She tried to press her hand against his mouth.

"I mean it. Do you really know what the hell you're doing?"

"Of course I do. I - - a twenty-eight-year-old-spinster, of sound mind and body - - am going to run away to a town I never even heard of for the purpose of marrying a guy I've known exactly seven days. Is there anything odd about that?"

"I'm serious, Jess. Shouldn't you know a little more about me, or something?"

"Like what? I know that your name is Peter Nolan. I know that you live in Coeurville, New York, in a big white house surrounded by rose bushes and trees. I know that you do scientific research on a bomb - - "

"Not a bomb," he smiled. "A computer. Electronics. See, you're romanticizing me already."

"Don't interrupt. You are visiting New York City for the pure morbid pleasure of it, currently rooming at the Chesterfield Inn. You make five hundred dollars a month, but have saved nothing - - which tells me a good deal more about you than I care to know. But - - let me finish! Apart from the libertine side of your personality, you are moderately intelligent - - and immoderately handsome - - kind to small dogs and old chestnut vendors but cool towards the rest of humanity. You prefer Basie to Bach, Grandma Moses to Van Gogh, and haven't made up your mind about this Faulkner critter.

Above all, you're lonely and in desperate need of a woman five feet nine inches tall with black hair answering to the name of Jessica." She exhaled. "Now, is there anything important that I've missed? Not counting the multitudes of dark women out of your past, of course."

He picked up the wicker basket. "Okay," he said. "You got me dead to rights."

"In that case, let us away - - before you start asking questions about me."

He kissed her very hard and held her.

"You'll like Coeurville, Jess," he said. "I know you will."

"I'd better, if I expect you to make an honest woman out of me! That town is rough competition."

"It's a good town."

She took the basket and waited for him to gather up the suitcases. "Homesick already," she murmured, "after not even two weeks away."

"You'll see," he said. "It's quite a place."

She nodded and looked around the apartment. Then she closed the door and locked it.

"Come on," she said, "let's go make it legal."

F*ire!*
A bright leaf on the rotted curtain first and then two leaves

and three, and then the curtain falling and the leaves turned into blazing yellow ivy, reaching up the wall, across the floor, over all the tables and chairs, growing - -

"Walter!"

- - a forest of flame, hungry . . . and the man with the bandage quiet, still and quiet, waiting to be eaten . . .

Peter Nolan opened his eyes, quickly. The dream lingered a moment, and vanished.

"Has nightmares," Jess said, "screams, twitches, talks gibberish. *This* you didn't tell me."

The dream was gone. He tried to remember it, but it was gone. "Must have been the pastrami," he said, yawning, vaguely aware of the heat inside his skull. "Pastrami doesn't care much for me."

"I'd say it hates your guts." She whistled. "And who, may I inquire, is Walter?"

"Who is who?"

"You kept yelling Walter."

"Well," he said, "this is a poor time to be telling you, I suppose, but . . . he happens to be my brother."

"What?"

"Yes. We keep him in the cellar. I don't like to think about it."

"Pete."

"I don't know any Walter."

"Really?"

"Not that I can remember, anyway. Maybe he's the Father-Sym-

bol . . . or would that be the Mother-Symbol?"

"Probably," Jess said, "it's the Sex-Symbol. Walter is your repressed libido, and he's champing at the bit."

The highway sloped gently and curved past an immense field of wild growth. Beyond the field there were farm houses and straggles of horses and wide shade trees, small and bright in the clear air. The thunder of rockets rumbled distantly.

Peter Nolan stretched and yawned again. "Want me to take over?"

"If you want to." Jess stopped the car and they switched seat positions.

"Which reminds me," she said, "just how far is this rustic paradise?"

"Well . . ." He studied the countryside. "I *ought* to know, but I generally come through at night . . ."

"Pretty country, anyway," she said.

"The prettiest." He squinted, leaned close to the windshield. "I know where we are now. See that scatter creek?"

"Yup."

"Used to play there when I was a kid. Every time I ran away from home, this is as far as I got. Water's ice cold."

"Good old Scatter Creek!"

He nudged her. "Don't be so damn big-city. I intend to acquaint you with every square inch of Coeurville, and you're going to love it."

"Aye, aye," she said, sleepily.

"Over there's Lonely Yew Lane. Great place for sparking with the girlies."

"How would you know?"

"Among sparking circles," he said, "I was referred to as *The Electrode*."

She made feline movements against him. "I'll just bet you're the best known figure in town."

"Only one of the best," he admitted. Then, "Lean your head on my shoulder - - we've got an hour anyway."

She closed her eyes. In a tired, contented voice she whispered, "Pete Nolan, you have the sharpest, boniest, damndest shoulders in all the world."

He slipped his arm around her, and they drove in silence for a while. Things, he thought, are very good. Things are about as good as they can be. If they were any better, I would go berserk.

He thought of how he and Jess had met, only a week before. It had been late at night, and he had been walking . . . where? Somewhere. And he was in the middle of the street, when the light changed to red. Then something happened - - he couldn't figure out what, or

why. Shock, maybe. Anyway, suddenly he was lying on his back, with the bumper of a car less than three feet from his head. This car. And Jess, standing there, white-faced and trembling. '*Are you hurt, Mister?*' '*You never laid a wheel on me.*' '*In that case, I don't mind telling you, buddy, you have reduced me to a nervous wreck.*' '*How about a drink?*' '*A drink would be fine.*'

THE FIELD GAVE WAY to lawns and small houses and fresh-fruit stands.

Peter Nolan eased off the accelerator. They passed a sign which read: *You are entering Coeurville, N.Y. — Pop. 3,550.*

Then the houses multiplied and soon there were stores and motels.

"Mah plantation," he boomed. "Fur as th' eye kin see!"

It was a very small town, and very narrow, pressed by grassy knolls and shaded by giant poplars which burst from the sidewalks. The streets were white and clean. Above the streets banners announcing a fair drifted calmly in the breeze, all reds and greens. There were a lot of women, but also a number of old men.

Peter Nolan smoothed the powerful turbines down and dropped rapidly from 114 miles-per-hour to a calm 40. He sighed. "There's the New Brunswick," he

gestured. "Got an ice cream parlor and a magazine shop. You can get cigarettes there, too, if you can prove you're over twenty-one - - Mr. van Brooks is very strict about that."

"I shouldn't have too much trouble."

"Over there's the Foodbag grocery where we trade. Depot's over to the right, you can't see it now. And - - "

He narrowed his eyes.

He looked at a large red office building on the corner.

"Come on, don't stop now."

He shook his head, almost imperceptibly. " - - library's down Elm street, there. - - "

A red office building in Coeurville?

As he tried to place it, a clothing store glided slowly past the car window. Helmer's Men's Wear. Wide glass front, yellow plastic shade, perfectly ordinary and not in the least peculiar - - except, he couldn't recall any Helmer's Men's Wear.

It was brand new to him.

Brother, you're an observant one, all right. Too much work . . .

Town could burn down, you wouldn't know it.

Burn down . . .

"Pete, do me a favor."

"Sure."

"Let's get a quick one before meeting the gang, huh? Just one

quick one."

"No can do," he said. "Have to go into Temple for liquor. That's four miles away."

"I thought I saw a bar back there on the main drag."

"Not in Coeurville you didn't." He frowned, felt a tenseness spring into life inside him. "How about coffee?"

"Okay."

He nosed the car onto a shoulder and cut the engine. *Burn . . .*

"Hey."

They walked past a dry goods store and a motion picture theatre and a drugstore.

And entered a small hotel lobby.

"Pete, what's biting you?"

He dropped the frown. "Nothing. The nervous bridegroom is all."

"Maybe we ought to get married right away," Jess said. She looked around the deserted lobby. It was dark and musty. "You want to get coffee here?" she said, dubiously.

"Down the street," someone said. Jess turned and faced an amiable old man in a blue suit. He was standing behind a desk. "Four stores down. Kelsey's Cafe."

Peter Nolan walked over to the man. "This is the Imperial isn't it?" he asked, and thought, Of course this is the Imperial. What a stupid question.

"Sure is, Mister."

Sure is, Mister. Who is this old

bird, anyway?

"You close up your coffee shop?"

"Nope. Never had a coffee shop. Just the hotel."

The tenseness increased. "That's certainly very interesting," he told the man, remembering the five hundred or more times he'd eaten lunch here.

He snorted and walked across the lobby. It looked the same. Even the dust looked the same. He returned to the desk. "Is this a gag?"

The old man took a step backwards. "Beg pardon?"

Jess laughed. "Come on," she said, "they're probably using it for an orgy, stag only."

"But - -"

Outside in the sunlight, Peter Nolan looked at the building carefully.

"It was here," he said, pointing to the brick wall. "At least, I think it was. Or else - - did he say Kelsey's Cafe?"

"That's what he said."

"I never heard in my entire life of a Kelsey's Cafe." He turned his head, peered up and down the street. It was the same, and yet, somehow, it wasn't the same.

"You sure we're in the right town, Petesey?" Jess said. "I know how absent-minded you scientific men are."

"Of course I'm sure."

"Well, don't snap at me . . ."

"Look, Jess - - let's go on home, get something there. I think maybe I'm a little upset. All right?"

"Sure."

They went back to the car.

"Is it far?"

"Just a few blocks." He felt the tenseness growing. As the houses passed, it grew. He thought about the red building, the bar Jess said she'd seen, and now this ridiculous business with the coffee shop . . . Just a mix-up, of course, that and his natural nervousness.

No. Something was wrong. He knew it, he could feel the wrongness all around him.

"That's it, isn't it?" Jess said. She was looking at a large square white house.

"Yeah." The familiarity of the house restored his spirits. The feeling drained away. "Your future home, Miss Lang." He stopped the car.

"It's beautiful, Pete. Really."

HE GOT OUT of the car. "Think I better go in first," he said. "The shock would be too great for Aunt Mildred."

"I thought you'd written her."

"I did, but I forgot to - -" He took the letter from his inside coat pocket, and grinned.

"God, and you worry about forgetting coffee shops!"

He walked across the porch and tried the door.

It was locked.

He removed a key from his pocket and inserted it. It didn't work.

The feeling came back, sickeningly. He twisted the key first one way and then the other, and examined the chain to see that he'd not made a mistake.

The door opened.

"What is it?" A fat man with a fat red face stood glaring.

Peter Nolan glanced at the house numbers: 515. He glared back at the man. "Who are you?"

The fat man closed one eye. An old friend of Mildred's, probably - - Mildred had so many screwy friends. Or a plumber, maybe. "Look, my name's Nolan. I live here. I own the house."

The fat man scratched his chin. He said nothing.

"Where's Mildred?"

"Who?"

"Mildred Nolan! Say, what the hell are you doing here, anyway?"

"It's none of your business," the fat man told him, "but I happen to live here. I've lived here for nine years, bought the place from Gerald Butler, got the deed to prove it. There ain't nobody named Mildred here and I never saw you before in my life." He started to close the door. "You got the wrong house."

"Look, fella, you're headed for a lot of trouble. I mean it. Now

open up, and - - "

The fat man slammed the door hurriedly.

Peter Nolan walked back to the car. He turned and stared.

"What's up?" Jess asked.

He looked at the house. At the curtains he'd never seen, and the *fresh* white paint, and the green doormat . . . He thought about the key that didn't fit the lock.

"Pete."

Goddamn it, what was happening? This was his house, all right, there wasn't any doubt of that. No doubt at all. None.

He looked at Jess, opened his mouth, closed it, and walked quickly across the street.

He went up the steps of a brown shake bungalow, and rapped on the door.

"Mrs. Cook! Hey, Jennie!"

A young girl appeared at the open window. "Who'd you want?" she said.

"Mrs. Cook. I've got to talk with her."

The girl leaned on her elbows. "Mrs. Cook died," she said. "Didn't you know?"

"What . . . did you say?"

"Three years ago. You aren't her cousin from Chicago, are you?"

"No," he said, dazedly. "No, I'm not. Sorry." He walked slowly back across the street and got into the car.

Jess was frowning, searching his

face. "What is it, Pete?" she said. "Don't you think you better clue me in?"

"I don't—" He ran a hand through his hair. "The kid over there claims Mrs. Cook has been dead for three years."

"So what?"

"I had lunch with Mrs. Cook just before I left for New York . . . a week and a half ago."

FOR a long time now he had driven in silence, gazing directly ahead at the road, his hands tight about the steering wheel. The tachometer needle was hovering around the danger mark.

Jess sat close to the door. The smile that usually played about her face was gone. She looked different, just as everything looked different, and she no longer had the sixteen or seventeen year old's look.

For Peter Nolan the tension was now like a steel rail bent almost to the breaking point. It would snap at any moment, he felt sure. Because there was no suspecting now, only knowing, knowing absolutely. They'd driven from his house—that house, he wasn't sure whose it was any longer—to the city hall. Fred Dickey would clear things up, make the proper explanations, good old Fred. Except good old Fred hadn't recognized him. Neither had Bert Zangwill

over at the sheriff's office—Bert, who used to tell him stories, who was a hero to him! And the others, the friends he had known all his life—all dead, or gone away, or unable to remember him . . .

But not completely unable. That was the strangest thing of all. The way they would stare and seem about to greet him and then shake their heads . . .

He felt like screaming now, as he remembered how Jess' face had changed in the past two hours, how her eyes had changed, how she looked at him, the suspicion and the wonder only too obvious.

God, maybe I am nuts, he thought, maybe I really am. Then, No, dammit! This is Coeurville and this is my home and I know every foot of it. That tree over there, the strawberry patch we're passing, everything. I do!

Jess was rubbing the back of her neck. "Pete—"

"Yes?"

"You said something a little while ago, back in town . . . You said it was as though Coeurville had aged twenty years. Didn't you?"

"That's right. Twenty years—in a week and a half."

"Maybe not," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not really sure, but—this is going to sound corny. I just mean, what if it's true? What if

twenty years actually have gone by?"

"Rip van Winkle?"

She shrugged. "Well, why not? At least it's a possibility."

"No," he said "I thought of it, but it doesn't hold up. For a lot of reasons. One, it would make me at least forty-five—unless I left at age ten. Which couldn't very well be, because I went to high school and college here. And that," he sighed, nervously, "brings us to the real beaut. There are no records of my having attended Coeurville High. Remember?"

She nodded.

"And the university I work for, dear old Coeurville U., it doesn't even exist. It never existed." He thought of the feeling in his chest when they'd driven out onto that unbroken field of grass which had been a campus, had been, he knew, had to have been. "And what about Mildred?"

Jess shivered slightly.

"Mildred was the head of the Garden Club," he continued. "She got around town like a visiting Congressman, all the time. Everybody knew her. And now there isn't a single trace of evidence to show that Mildred Nolan ever lived in Coeurville, New York."

"Okay, so it won't work. It was an idea."

The berry patches became fields once more, golden brown and

dark, almost black, green. Peter Nolan turned down a small gravel road and decelerated sharply and drove the road that wound through the fields.

He hit the brake at a curve and slid to a stop.

"Wait here," he said.

He got out of the car and walked through the rusted wire gate of the cemetery. It was a small place, and very old. The gravestones were ornate carvings of fat children with wings or great scrolls or filigreed crosses, all grimed with age.

He walked across the raised humps of neglected lawn, toward the east end of the cemetery. Beyond the fence was rich grass, dairy cows grazing in utter silence, and a dark stream crossed by a trestle.

Peter Nolan approached two marble tombstones, and remembered with every step the sadness he had felt when he had stood exactly here, in the foul rain, and watched them lower his mother's casket, down close to the father he had never known.

The memory was alive and strong. It was the one thing he was sure of, now.

He knelt and stared at the twin epitaphs on the tombstones.

And felt the steel bar of tenseness inside him snap and explode into a million white-hot frag-

ments.

The epitaphs read:

MARY F. CUMMINGS

1883 - 1931

and

WALTER B. CUMMINGS, SR.

1879 - 1909

THE SKY WAS A DEEP red stain now. Jess pushed hard on the pedal, keeping it at a steady 140. Her lips were dry.

"We'll be home in a little while," she said, softly, "and then it'll be okay. Go on, pass out again. Rest."

The speed lane merged with the narrow highway and the traffic thinned and disappeared. Barns and farmhouses flashed past the window in a darkening blur.

Peter Nolan sat very still. He clutched his knees.

The pain that was not precisely that vanished and returned and grew and diminished. He fought it with all of his strength. But it would not stay away. Nothing he did would make it stay away.

Memories skirted close, and he kept reaching for them.

Fire. A man with bandages. A house.

He reached and sometimes came very near, and always missed. No. It would take something more than reaching. But what? And for what?

The car pulled into a service station and he shut his eyes against

the sudden brilliance.

What was she trying to do, anyway, blind him?

And who the hell did she think she was to order him around?

He looked at Jess. She smiled.

Then he remembered that she had used the word *doctor*. Why? To cure him, or - - to get rid of him, quietly?

Of course. One of her doctor friends would slip him a needle and that would be that. Never mind the reason. Women have their own reasons.

He waited until the sky had turned almost completely black, then he said, "Jess, would you please stop the car?"

She pulled over onto the dirt. "You going to be sick?"

"Yeah," he said. "I'll be back in a minute. I don't feel so good."

He went outside, leaped the shallow ditch, and walked into the dense foliage.

His shoe scraped. He bent down and patted the ground and closed his fingers about a large jagged stone.

Good. We'll see about doctors now.

"Jess!" he called. "Could you give me a hand?"

A pause. Then the sound of the metal door opening and slamming, and the sound of movement in the brush.

Jess walked over to him and touched his arm.

"Is it better?" she asked.

"Yes."

Her eyes moved to his hand.

He raised the stone, stood there with it raised, staring; then he turned and threw the stone into the foliage in back of him.

"What is it, Pete?"

"Stubbed my damn toe." He moved toward Jess and pulled her close. "Stubbed my toe on the rock." The pain was leaving. It had torn across his mind like a sheet of flame, until there had been only a dancing blackness. Now it was leaving.

Jess put her fingers against his face, gently. "Come on back to the car," she said.

He took his hands from her.

"Come on, Pete."

"All right. You go on - - I'll be there in a minute."

She looked at him helplessly, then she walked back. When she was gone, when he heard the door again, Peter Nolan closed his eyes. He waited for the pain to return, but it did not return. He tried to hang on to the memories that had been flying quickly through his brain, but they were elusive. Something about an old woman, something about a train, they were, and fire, and - -

He realized, suddenly, why he

had picked up the stone.

He had meant to kill Jess.

Why?

He bunched his fingers into fists and drove them, hard, into a tree, again, and again.

Then he stopped. The moon slid out of a clump of blackness, and spilled light over the land - - cool, soft, clear light.

Peter Nolan looked at his hands. He turned them over and looked at them.

They were white and dry.

The tree bark had torn away small strips and pieces of flesh, but there was no blood.

He carefully pulled a flap of skin down three inches below the wrist, and focused his eyes.

Beneath the flap of skin, where veins ought to have been, and cartilage, and bone, were hundreds of tiny flexible rods, jointed and gleaming, and infinitesimal springs, turning, and bright yellow coils of wire.

He looked at his wrist watch for a long time. Then he wrapped a handkerchief around the torn section, and went back to the car.

Jess was waiting. "Better now?" she asked, in the same genuine, unfrightened tone she had used before.

"Better," he said. Everything was returning now. Like relays clicking into place. Everything.

He threw his head back. "Drive to your apartment," he said, expressionlessly. "Let me off when I tell you to, then drive to your apartment and wait for me."

Jess said nothing. She started the car.

Soon they were in the outskirts of the city.

HE WALKED UP the circular driveway and stood for a moment, looking at the house. It was fat and sprawling and ugly: a little of 1860 and a little of 1960, brick and wood, gabled windows, false pilasters. Its color was gray, Where once had been white paint was now only this grayness. The age-bulged slats were pocked and cancered, held by crumbling nails.

He walked to the machine-carved door.

The knocker put out deep sound:

He waited, knocked again.

The door opened.

"Hello, Walter."

The tall man with the bandaged face sighed. "Pete," he said, extending his hand. "I've been waiting for you."

Peter Nolan walked with the tall man into a large room.

There were hundreds of books in this room, all shabby and worn, a few heavy pieces of furniture, mostly ancient, fancy letter open-

ers, dark lace curtains.

"Sit down," the tall man said. "Over there." He walked over to a small cupboard and poured whisky into a glass. "You've been to Coeurville, haven't you?"

"Yes. Tell me about it, Walter."

"But you know already. How else could you have come here?"

"I asked you to talk. Please."

The tall man paused, then shrugged. "All right." He reached up and tore loose from his forehead the upper strips of adhesive tape.

The bandage fell.

Peter Nolan stared at an exact duplicate of himself. Except for the stitched scar running from just below the left eye to the mouth, the face was a mirrored reflection.

"As you can see, you nearly blinded me with those scissors."

"From the beginning, Walter."

"But this is the beginning," the tall man said. Then, "All right. Your name is: Peter Nolan - - you know that."

"Yes."

"And you know that you were born eight days ago. I made the delivery: Doctor W. B. Cummings, Jr., Ph.D. I'm your mother. I'm also your father - - and every single one of your ancestors, too, unless we count the first adding machine."

"You're drunk."

"Aye. Drunk as an owl. Drunk

as a lord. Care to join me? It's quite possible, and I guarantee no hangover - -"

"All I want is for you to stow the colorful dialogue and tell me things."

The tall man tilted his glass. "You've been to Coeurville, so you've learned that Peter Nolan never lived there. You also know that you've been behaving - - oddly - - of late. And from the handkerchief around your hand, I should judge you know about that, too. With this information what can I tell you?"

"Who am I?" The heat was beginning again.

"You're nobody," the tall man said. "You're nobody at all."

"Stop it, Walter."

"Who is this watch I'm wearing? Ask me that. Who is the refrigerator in the kitchen? Don't you understand?" The man's eyes glinted briefly. "You're a machine, Pete."

Memories took solidier form. They came into focus.

But not entirely. Pieces were missing.

"Go on."

The tall man pulled his dressing gown closer about his unshaven throat. He seemed to talk to himself alone.

"You were born a long time ago, actually," he said. "Inside my head.

All kids have dreams, don't they? You were mine. The others thought about ice cream mountains and success with the F.B.I. and going to Mars, and swapped their dreams, and finally forgot them. I didn't. I thought about one thing and longed for one thing, always; just one: a *perfect* artificial man. Not just a robot, but a duplicate of a human being." He laughed. "It was harmless - - and not even terribly imaginative for a child. But then I stopped being a child. I became an adult - - only, I didn't forget my dream."

Peter Nolan picked up one of the letter openers. It was sturdy and sharp.

"All right," the tall man said, "I made you. Is that straight enough? It took a lot of years and a lot of money, and more failures than I like to think about. But I was patient. I studied, I read, I experimented. I'd already built a man - - also Peter Nolan: I like the name: no reason - - but he was nothing. A crude job. So I started all over again from scratch, duplicating from every manner of material the physical elements of the human body. People helped me, but they didn't know what it was for. Some of them solved problems I could never have solved. But - - don't you see? I wanted to give my man a brain that worked like

a brain; and emotions; and intelligence." He refilled the glass, took another swallow. "All that - - I dreamed. Of course, intelligence was the most difficult. You have no idea how difficult. My man had to have memories, he had to have reasoning power - - abstract reasoning power — a past, a personality — millions of intricate facets multiplied by millions to make up *intelligence*. Inventing these things from whole cloth would have taken forever. So I worked and found the answer. I would use myself. On certain cells I made certain impressions. My own memories went into the cells. Some of my talent. Some of my knowledge. Bits and pieces; of myself. It took a long time . . . a very long time."

THEY WERE SILENT for a time. Peter Nolan gripped the letter opener and struggled against the heat.

"You were perfect, I felt," the tall man went on. "But I had to be sure. Ten years ago you would have been impossible: since the discoveries in plastics, however, you were merely improbable. My plastic felt like flesh to *me*, and I had cushioned the mechanical parts so that they felt exactly like human bones when touched, but - - it would be the final test: to let you mingle with crowds, and observe closely

their reactions. I blocked out - - or tried to - - all memory of me and your actual construction. You were Peter Nolan, research scientist, in New York on a sabbatical . . . "

"You lived in Coeurville?" The question leapt out.

"Of course. For your past, I gave you my memories of the town. Some of them were probably quite inaccurate and incomplete - - I left Coeurville many years ago. Going there must have been an experience . . . "

"It was." Peter Nolan closed his eyes. "What about the University?"

"Fictitious. I had to give you a job."

"And Aunt Mildred?"

"A conceit. All the old women I've known in one. I worked out your relationship with her very carefully - - not at all necessary, I suppose. The female conquests, by the way, are also - - I regret to report - - imaginary." He shook a cigarette loose from a pack. "That's about all," he said. "You can fill in the rest. Up to last week, anyway."

"What about last week."

The tall man shook his head. "I wish I knew," he said. "Something went wrong, something mechanical . . . I couldn't tell. You attacked me with a pair of scissors

and I couldn't stop you. As you know, I've been unable to find you since."

"What's wrong with me?"

"I'm not sure. But - - look, Pete. You're me. Everything you know or feel or think reflects some portion of myself, Walter Cummings. If you wished to kill - - I've read the papers, I know about it; the conductor caught a glimpse of you - - it could only mean that there is some part of me that wished to kill. My own death-wish, inverted. Everyone has it. I mean, we're all potential suicides or murderers or rapists or thieves. We all have the seeds of paranoia, schizophrenia, or worse, lying inside us, somewhere - - from the moment we're born to the moment we die. But - - and here's the thing - - if we're normal, we're protected. We're protected by our inhibitions. These instincts are never given a chance to get out of hand. We may *want* to kill the loudmouthed woman downstairs, or we may *want* to commit suicide at times - - but usually we don't."

"So?"

"So, Pete, it would appear that my own 'seeds' are more developed than I'd realized. In you, they are. In giving you parts of myself, I also gave you - - although unintentionally - - my latent psychoses. Big ones. Big enough

to break through. . . ."

There was a long silence.

"To put it even clearer," the tall man said, "you're insane."

Peter Nolan rose from the couch and walked over to the window. The night pressed, moved, tugged at the branches of dead trees.

"Can I be - - fixed?"

The tall man shrugged.

The heat dripped faster, melting into pain. Whirlings and bright dots and pain. "Can I?"

"I don't know."

"Why don't you know?"

"Because . . . much as I hated to admit it, luck had a great deal to do with your success." The man stared at the letter opener in Peter Nolan's hand. "Skill alone wasn't enough. There were so many failures before, they should have made it clear - - but they didn't. I was obsessed."

"What are you saying?"

"That you were an accident. I was a blind man with a machine gun, Pete. I kept shooting and reloading and shooting and finally I hit the target; but it was off-center. I don't know that I could even come close again."

Peter Nolan fought the pain, grasped at the picture of an old woman falling toward dark tracks.

THE TALL MAN smiled, wanly.
"But that's the story of my

life, right down the line. A long series of failures. I told myself that I wanted to make an artificial man, but I think my real aim was simply to build another Walter Cummings. Only, without the shyness, without the frustration - - a reverse Jekyll and Hyde. All I wished I was. The 'real' me"

Peter Nolan turned. "I came here to kill you," he said.

The tall man nodded.

"I was going to kill you and set fire to the house."

"I know. I felt like doing it myself. It's what I'd do if I were in your shoes."

"There's a girl, Walter."

The tall man raised his eyebrows; then he lit another cigarette, slowly, off the old one.

"Does she know?" he said.

"No. I took her with me to Coeurville; we were going to get married there; and she thinks I'm probably nuts - - but she doesn't know. She's in love with me."

"Pretty?"

"And intelligent. And lonely - - something you ought to be able to understand. She's got a fine life all mapped out, for her and me, together."

"That's - - too bad," the tall man said. He pressed his fingertips into his temples. "I'm truly sorry, Pete."

"Her name is Jessica Lang. She

has old-fashioned ideas about virtue: that's why she never found out, I imagine." Peter Nolan gripped the edge of the chair. "That would have been a nice scene."

"No," the tall man said. "You're perfect. It would have gone all right - - that is, if she's a virgin. It would seem strange, but then, it always does. Or so I've heard."

The pain jabbed in and out, fire-tipped needles, jabbing.

The tall man rose from the couch-arm on which he had been seated. "Well," he said, "what are we going to do?"

"You can't fix me for sure?"

"No."

"You can't stop me from killing. You can't make me grow old, either - - I'll always be like this. I'm insane and I'll stay insane, until something goes out - - then I'll die. Is that it?"

"I'm sorry, Pete. I wanted you to be all the things I wasn't; that's the truth. If I'd known - -"

Peter Nolan put his hands out. "She'd learn about it, some day," he said.

"Yes. She would."

"She'd find out, or I'd kill her - - I almost did, tonight. I might kill Jess."

"You might."

The two figures were very quiet for a time. The wind beat against the loose window panes, and

against the shutters of the house.

They were quiet, listening.

Then Peter Nolan said: "Do you want to make it right, Walter?"

The tall man clenched his fists. "I would give anything to do that."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"Yes."

"Then listen to me carefully. You're going to build another Peter Nolan - -"

"What?"

"That's right. You're going to build another me, and it's going to be right, this time, and you're going to do it tonight. This Peter Nolan is going to marry Jess; and he's going to be happy, for the first time in his life."

The tall man stared.

Understanding came into his eyes, slowly.

"It's something you can do - - now - - isn't it?"

"I think so."

"Then let's get to work, before I jam this letter opener into your chest."

"Pete - -"

"Come on."

Together, they walked into the hall and down the long flight of stairs to the laboratory below.

Hours later one of them returned to the study.

THE DOOR WAS OPENED to the length of its chain by a

girl who was mostly shadow.

The tall man put his hands behind his back and smiled. "Well, ma'am," he said, "see I'm a member of the Junior Woodchucks - -"

"Pete, get in here this minute. I've been worried sick."

The tall man walked into the apartment. He paused for a moment, then he took the girl into his arms and kissed her. She pulled away. "And now, before I go crazy," she said, "will you please tell me what this is all about?"

The tall man smiled. "I'll tell you what it's all about," he promised. "But let's not talk here."

"I want to know if you're all right," Jess said, looking at him. "What's that scar on your face?"

"I'm all right," the tall man said. "Come on, a drink. Get your coat."

Jess went to the closet and pulled out a jacket and slipped it on.

They went out of the apartment. A cold gray moon spread light across the streets.

"Pete, something is wrong. I know it is."

"No," the tall man said. "Other way around. Something is right, for a change." He held her arm and looked at her and then she saw his smile and stopped talking.

They went into a bar.

At a table, after they ordered,

he lit a cigarette for her. Then he lit one for himself. He held the flame of the lighter before his face for a long moment, and he heard her exclaim as he ran his index finger through the flame. Hot pain seared through him. He pulled his finger away, snapped off the lighter and grinned at her.

"What did you burn your finger for, Pete? You did it deliberately"

He laughed. "Couldn't help it. Had to prove something to myself."

"What?"

He shrugged, still smiling. "Had to make sure I was really flesh and blood and not some part of a plastic nightmare"

"I don't understand, Pete."

"Not necessary, honey. Not at all. Everything's ok. The past is gone and for the first time in my life I'm looking forward to the future. In a way I guess we're seeing each other for the first time. What I see is nice."

The waiter brought their drinks. He raised his, wiggled his burnt finger for her to do likewise, and proffered a toast.

Outside the bar an old man in a dirty white raincoat walked up and down, carrying newspapers.

"Subway killer still at large!" the old man shouted.

His voice was a whisper in the wind.

THE END



World Alone



A FURIOUS spate of activity is taking place in the Antarctic the last frontier of the planet Earth! Alone of all the vast areas of this Earth, the Antarctic regions remain to a great—but decreasing—extent unknown.

Nations of the globe are pouring men and ships and planes into the region for many reasons, but not the least is that the magic uranium is believed to exist in quantity there. If it is there, no matter how deeply buried or how isolated the location, men will dig it out.

But uranium is a minor treasure in one sense. Petroleum and coal,

the sources for so many organic riches can be found there too. Geologists predict that when intensive analysis, such as the white land is now undergoing, is completed, the Antarctic will be found to be the richest of the Earth's land masses.

The bleakness and sparseness of this inhuman lump of ice would seem enough to chill the soul of anyone, but the rewards and promises lie buried in the ice—and that is enough.

One plan has been suggested to use the Antarctic as a gigantic storage refrigerator for the surplus food of our country. This is per-

fectly feasible even from an economic viewpoint—certainly from a physical one—explorers still eat the food left at Little America.

The Antarctic may be a bigger source of weather—good and bad—than we know. It has been suggested that men use this vast reserve of “coolth” to air condition the Earth

by changing the course of the ocean currents so that they pass near the huge refrigerator that constitutes the frozen land.

Whatever comes of the Geophysical Year you may be sure that the Antarctic Regions will be heard from again. The last Terran Frontier ...



"Lettuce! What's it look like?"

Outcast Of The Stars

by

Bob Silverberg

Yorkan Varr was exiled to the prison planet for a crime he knew he had never committed. Oddly, the man who had sent him there was a prisoner too!

“WE’RE COMING CLOSE to earth now, Yorkan Varr,” said the patrolman. “We’ll be dumping you any minute now.”

The man addressed as Yorkan Varr scowled bitterly. “You’re making a mistake, I tell you. I didn’t kill that man. I didn’t even know him!”

The patrolman shrugged. “Sorry, but that’s the way things go. The court said you’re guilty — and here you are. Don’t jump on me. I’m just doing my job.”

Yorkan Varr made no reply. There was no sense arguing with the patrolman, after all. There was no sense arguing with anyone.

He got up and stared out the viewplate at the mottled, spinning globe of Earth below, growing closer every moment, and his thin lips curled in an angry grimace. *Earth*. The garbage world, the

dumping-ground for the Galaxy’s undesirables. Who’d ever imagine that he — Yorkan Varr — would someday be approaching Earth for a life of exile?

He whirled to face the unsmiling patrolman. “Dammit, Hober, I *didn’t* kill him! You can’t throw me into that refuse-heap down there! You can’t do it!”

“Please, Yorkan Varr. We’re approaching the moment when we must part.” The patrolman held out a hand. “I’m sorry to have to do this to you. It’s my job, that’s all. Shake?”

Yorkan Varr stared at the extended hand for a moment, then slapped it away. The patrolman smiled apologetically and rang a bell. Three other men, also in the bronze uniform of the Condeleri Federation, appeared from within and saluted.

“Get the disposal ship ready,”

I didn't kill him, he thought fiercely. I didn't kill him.

When he awoke, he found himself lying in a wooded area. He sat up in the grass and tried to get his bearings. He was dressed in rough, oddly-cut clothing, and in his hand was a letter-capsule. He broke it open and read the note inside.

To Yorkan Varr:

You have been accused and found guilty of the crime of murder. Therefore, you have been placed on the planet Sol III to live out the rest of your natural life.

However, in order that you may not be helpless, we have provided you with clothing, money, and identification. You will be able to get along in this society if you are careful. We warn you, however, that the people of this planet actually kill for punishment of certain crimes. Govern yourself accordingly.

The Council of Judges.

AS YORKAN READ the last line, the message paper faded, grayed, and crumbled in his hand. It became a powder and fell, like fine ash, from his fingers.

And with it went the last thing that connected him with the Condelari Federation.

Yorkan stood up and looked up

at the stars. *I know who did it, he thought. But I couldn't prove it.*

He had seen the man's face just before he had blanked out from the stungun. When he had awakened, he found himself with a corpse and a charge of murder against him.

He looked down at himself again. His suit was coarsely woven and crude. He reached instinctively into his pocket and pulled out a billfold. The cards in it said he was John Arthur Stern, a retired war veteran who had been badly wounded during his service in the United Nations Police, during the African Insurrection of 1986.

"Well, fine," he said bitterly to the trees around him. "Where does that get me?"

"You're an Earthman now," said a voice. "That's what you'll have to remember."

Yorkan whirled at the sound of the soft, liquid voice.

"Who's that?" He found himself using English, the predominant language of this part of the exile planet. The language had been hypnotically implanted in his brain.

The girl was standing less than ten yards from him. In the moonlight, her hair and skin seemed almost silvery. She was light of complexion, he realized, and her hair was a light red-blond. "Who the

devil are you?"

She smiled a little and walked toward him. He felt a little odd; here he was, in a wood on a primitive planet, knowing almost nothing of the civilization that surrounded him, confronted by an Earthgirl who seemed to know him.

"It's a shock, I know," she was saying; "but you'll get over it. I know where you came from; you're a Condelarian. You've been exiled to this planet. We don't ask why you were sent here, nor what you did, nor what your real name is. What's the name on your identity card?"

"Stern," he said. "John Arthur Stern. But that doesn't explain why you're here."

The smile left her face. "We're all exiles here; the Group is composed entirely of exiles. We keep tabs on the prison ships that bring new offenders here, and we try to meet each one and tell them what's going on on this planet."

"And who are you?" he asked.

"Elizabeth Kirk is the name I was given. And as far as we are both concerned, that's my name."

"Very well, Elizabeth. Now, would you kindly explain what's going on?" He didn't trust the girl.

She stopped a few feet away, evidently realizing his suspicions. "Several hundred of us have been

exiled here in the past few years," she explained. "We have been able to contact each other for our mutual protection. We help each other to learn to get along with the native Earthmen."

"Is that all?" He felt that the Group — whatever it was — must be doing more than that.

"Come with me," Elizabeth said. "I'll take you to the Group. They can explain everything. Our leader will tell you all about it."

Yorkan — no, Stern. He'd have to think of himself as Stern from now on — Stern followed the girl out of the wooded area. There was an automobile parked near a winding ribbon of road. She got behind the wheel and started the engine. The turboelectric motor whirled softly, and the car started down the highway.

"We're near Suffern, New York," the girl told him conversationally. "It's about an hour's drive from New York City itself."

The names brought forth hypnotically implanted memories in Stern's mind. But he found he didn't care where he was, really; all he wanted to do was get away from this planet — to prove, somehow, that he was innocent of the crime of which he had been accused.

The girl evidently sensed that her passenger didn't want to talk,

because she didn't say another word during the drive into the city.

Stern didn't ask any questions; he wanted to think things out for himself. Besides, he had a hunch that he wouldn't get any satisfactory answers if he did ask her questions.

IT WAS ALMOST DAWN when the car pulled up in front of the huge glass and aluminum building at 582 Fifth Avenue. The girl parked the car and opened the door. Then she spoke for the first time in over an hour.

"Shall we go in?"

John Stern grinned bitterly. "I may as well; what other choice do I have?"

"None, really," she said. "Come along."

She produced a key to the front door of the building, twisted it in the lock, and swung open one of the glass doors. Stern followed her to the bank of elevators, where she produced another key, unlocked the elevator, and ushered him inside.

She pushed the control button, and the car lifted rapidly.

Stern grinned inwardly. He was amused at his own helplessness. He knew very little about this world, so he couldn't turn down an opportunity to learn something

about it, but he still felt as though he were being pushed into something he didn't like.

He wasn't going to let himself be pushed; that much he was sure of. Sol Three — Earth — was a dumping ground for criminals; what right did criminals have in organizing a group of their own? And how had they done it?

Yorkan Varr — now John Stern — didn't feel himself a criminal. He knew he had done nothing wrong; the evidence against him in the Galactic Court had been damning, but he knew that the Council of Judges had done the only thing they could have done at the time. He didn't hold any grudge against them; they had done what was right, what was in the real interests of civilization and the Condelari Federation.

Therefore, he felt that any group of criminals who organized against the Federation was definitely in the wrong.

Elizabeth said: "Eighteenth floor. We get out here."

They stepped out of the elevator, turned to the left, and walked down the hall. There was a light on in the office at the end of the hall — Suite 1814. The girl used another key on the door and walked into a room that was bare except for a few pictures on the wall, a couple of chairs, and a couch. She

walked over to the wall and pressed a button in an intricate code. Then she walked over to the couch and sat down. She patted the cushion beside her.

"You may as well sit down, John Stern; Matt Skardoth won't be able to talk to us for several minutes."

Stern didn't sit down. He walked over to the girl and stood over her.

"Look, honey," he said coldly, "I've come this far. Now tell me what it's all about. What sort of organization is this?"

She looked up at him calmly and took a cigarette out of her purse. Stern watched curiously as she lit it.

She saw his gaze and smiled. "It's an Earthman's habit," she said. "It's harmless and rather nice. Try one?"

He pushed away the proffered package. "No. I want information."

Elizabeth leaned back and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

"It's very simple," she said. "All of us have been exiled illegally. We've been put on this barbaric planet for crimes we haven't committed. We're organizing to take over the Earth government. We're going to get a spaceship built that can take us out of here."

There was a hum at the door that led to the inner office, and the door swung quietly open.

Elizabeth stood up. "Come along, John; Matt Skardoth, our leader, will talk to you."

There were several men and women working in the inside office. A few of them glanced up, then went back to the work they were doing. It looked like a pretty efficient organization.

It was when Stern stepped into the inner office that he got his big shock. The man sitting behind the desk was a pleasantly smiling individual with dark, close-cropped hair and a wide, easy smile. But Stern had seen that face before; it was the man who had killed Bargon Frosz; the man who had committed the crime for which Yorkan Varr had been condemned!

STERNS' EYES WIDENED, then he regained control of himself.

"I'm Matt Skardoth," the man behind the desk said. His voice was deep; mellow. "Welcome to our little group, Mr. — ah — "

"Stern."

"Stern." Skardoth leaned forward. "You know, of course, what the aims of our organization are."

"To build a ship and get off Earth, isn't it?" Stern said. He thought: *This is incredible. Here I am talking to the murderer whose rap I took, and -*

"Exactly," Skardoth said. "We've

been exiled unjustly — and we're determined to take steps to save ourselves. You don't have to join us; but I think it's in your best interest to do so."

It was at that point that Stern realized what the man behind the desk was doing. Matt Skardoth was the leader of the Group! And yet, Matt Skardoth had managed to murder Bargon Frösz and frame Yorkan Varr for the crime.

And the murder had taken place less than six months before!

Obviously, the man called Matt Skardoth had some way of getting off the planet Earth!

John Stern had to clench his jaw muscles to keep from saying anything. If he were to denounce Skardoth now, without proof, it would probably cost him his life.

He noticed that Skardoth was looking at him queerly, and he realized that he had been acting unusually.

"What's the matter?" Skardoth asked.

Smothering his hatred for the man who had falsely condemned him, Stern said: "Nothing — nothing. I'm just a little surprised, that's all. I thought this planet would be a living hell; a planet where I'd have to watch out for myself every moment. I'm glad to see that I was wrong, but it's a little shocking — that's all."

Skardoth's smile returned. "That's natural; most of us feel that way."

"I'm sure," Stern said. It took every bit of self-control he had to keep from leaping across the desk at the man.

It was clear that the man had something else in mind than the freeing of people who had been condemned by the Council of Judges. What was it that Elizabeth had said?

All of us have been exiled illegally.

If that was true, it meant that Matt Skardoth was behind the illegal ostracism of every Condelarian citizen on the planet!

And that was the main thing that held Stern back. If what he thought was actually true, then he was the only one who really knew what Matt Skardoth had done! And, by the way Skardoth was treating him, Skardoth didn't know that Stern was aware of his identity!

Skardoth leaned back behind his desk and smiled blandly. "It is probably obvious to you that the Federation has, for some reason of its own, framed you on this charge." He smiled softly. "Naturally, I don't know why you've been condemned to Earth, but that doesn't concern the Group. We *do* know that you have been condemned il-

legally — so you will want to escape.

"What we have in mind is this: we will get away from this planet after we have taken it over. We will force the Condelari Federation to recognize us as an independent government. Are you with us?"

Stern forced a grin. "I'm with you."

"Excellent," said Skardoth. "We will have use for you." He put out his hand, and Stern, feeling trapped, took it.

"Good luck, John Stern," said Skardoth.

It was that last remark that finally made up Stern's mind; Skardoth shouldn't have known his *first* name! He shouldn't have known any part of the name that the Council of Judges had assigned to Yorkan Varr. Since he did, it meant that Matt Skardoth knew more than he should!

IT WAS NEARLY three weeks before "John Stern" figured out a method of attack. If he could only get his hands on Matt Skardoth, he'd be able to prove that he, Yorkan Varr, was innocent of the crime of which he had been accused. And, possibly, he would be able to prove that the others of the Group were innocent, too.

Skardoth's plan was quite-evident. Earth was a Class Q-1 civili-

zation; it bordered on being admitted to the Federation. But Skardoth had been on Earth for five hundred years; the short-lived Earthmen had no idea that their destinies had been controlled by a being whose life span was nearly ten times as long as theirs.

Yorkan Varr — he tried to think of himself as John Stern now — was, like all citizens of the Federation, extremely long-lived. He would easily live to be a thousand — perhaps more. But the Exiles had, in the last few centuries, taken advantage of the Earthmen — a fact which had not been communicated to the Council of Judges. The Council evidently thought that the Earth was still in the lower classes of civilization; they didn't realize that Earthmen had already built interplanetary spaceships and might yet build interstellar vehicles.

Stern felt he could trust the girl, Elizabeth. She seemed to be aware that something was wrong, but she didn't quite seem to know what.

One night, Skardoth assigned both of them to go out to Long Island to take a look at the Nuclear Power Plant there. He wanted data on the new nucleoelectric energies that had been developed.

Elizabeth was supposedly a nuclear scientist assigned to the Long

Island plant; for twelve years she had built up her identity there.

But, as they approached the installation, she slowed the car and parked it alongside the road.

"What's the idea, Liz?" he asked.

"There's something troubling you Johnny. What is it?"

He looked at her bleakly. "You really want to know?"

She nodded and started to say something, but before she could answer, he said: "Okay; I'll tell you. We — you and I, and all the others of the Group — are being led by the nose. Skardoth is using us for his own purposes."

Rapidly, he explained what he knew about the leader of the group. When he had finished, he held his breath. If the girl didn't believe him —

Elizabeth nodded slowly. "I know," she said softly. "I've known for a long time. So have most of the others. We knew he was controlling us." Then her blue eyes flashed hatred. "But we didn't know he was framing us. We knew that what he was doing was wrong, but we didn't realize that it was Skardoth who got us into this."

"Then you believe me?" he asked.

She turned to him, her deep blue eyes looking straight into his.

Her voice was low and whispering when she spoke. "Of course I believe you, you idiot! But what could I do? I've been on this planet a long time; nearly, seventy years. I know what Skardoth wants. He wants to take over this planet and then take over the Galaxy. These people — the Earthlings — have more potential power than any other race in the universe. Given another century, they'll outdo us in almost every field. If they're on the side of the Condelari Federation, we'll be all right; but if they're on the side of Skardoth, then the Federation is helpless."

Stern nodded. "That's right. The Federation has misjudged these people. The Council of Judges still thinks that they're stupid barbarians — and they're not."

He took a deep breath. "We're in one hell of a jam, Liz; we've both been framed for something we haven't done. I *know* that Skardoth is responsible for the whole thing. He must be much older than he looks. How old would you say he was?"

Elizabeth shrugged. "Middle-aged, I'd say. Maybe nine hundred years."

Stern shook his head. "More than that. I've been keeping tabs on what has happened here on Earth for the past few centuries. By careful analysis, I've spotted

the first time that Skardoth came to this planet." He reached out and touched her hand. "He's been here for more than twelve hundred years."

Her eyes narrowed. "That means that he's had some method of escape all these years. He's got an interstellar ship planted somewhere."

"Sure. He framed all of us; he's managed to get all of us sent here as criminals. Liz, I tell you, he's *using* us!"

She started to say something, but, at that moment, the car radio broke into life. A harsh voice said:

"Very pretty. I'm sorry to have to deal with both of you this way."

It was as though Skardoth's voice had galvanized him into action. Stern heard the voice, and, before it had finished, he had opened the door of the car and flung himself out.

He tried to push Elizabeth out the other way, but it was too late. Just as John Stern tumbled out of the car, a greenish-yellow cloud of radiance appeared in the front seat for a fraction of a second. When it faded, Elizabeth was gone.

STERN PICKED HIMSELF up from the gravel at the side of the road and looked at the car. It was empty. It looked like any Terrestrial automobile. As he stood

up, he heard a faint voice over the radio.

"... too bad that he wasn't in the focus of the ray ..."

There was no more.

He knew, then, what had happened. Skardoth had had a voice pickup in the car. As soon as he had heard a confession from both of them, Skardoth had used a built-in transport field.

Stern stood there for a moment, looking at the empty car. He'd been lucky; if the transport field hadn't hit Elizabeth squarely, she would have been completely disintegrated. As it was, Elizabeth had been caught in the field, but Stern had not. She had been transported to wherever the field focus was located, and Skardoth assumed that John Stern had been half in and half out of the field, and had been dissipated into nothingness.

Stern grinned. That had been Matt Skardoth's last mistake.

STATE PATROL CAR 331, cruising along the Montauk-Manhattan highway, spotted a lone figure standing at the side of the road. He raised his hands and flagged them down.

Sergeant Riley applied the brakes and slowed down. His partner, Patrolman Garetti, eased his .38 out of its holster. It wasn't likely that the man who was flagging them

down was dangerous, but there was no use taking a chance. Patrol Car 331 slowed to a stop.

Sergeant Riley leaned out of the car window.

"What seems to be the trouble?" he asked.

John Stern pointed with one hand while the other hand touched the sergeant's neck. "My car," Stern said distinctly, "was stolen down there."

But, the instant his fingers had touched the police officer's neck, that officer had become a slave of his own nervous system.

"Okay; climb in," said Sergeant Riley.

Stern went around to the other side of the car, and Patrolman Garetti said: "Hey! Where are we supposed. . ."

But he was too late; Stern's hand had already touched his neck. Patrolman Garetti didn't argue in the least when the Sergeant said: "Okay, Garetti; let's get to Manhattan as fast as possible. Use the siren."

John Stern leaned back and relaxed while the police car headed toward Manhattan with its siren wide open. The cars ahead of them pulled over to the side as the State Police roared down the road toward Manhattan.

The road was fairly empty, that late at night. They sped toward the city at eighty miles an hour,

roared down the open stretches of flat roadway into the city.

The highway crowded up in Queens, but they hit the Triboro, crossed over into Manhattan, and moved on down Fifth Avenue toward 582.

"Okay," Stern said, as they reached Fiftieth Street. "Cut the siren and pull up outside 582. I'll take care of it from here."

The officers did as ordered. When Stern got out, he said "Forget all about what has happened. Go back to your beat."

The policemen pulled away without a sound.

Stern looked up at the building. There was still a light on the eighteenth floor.

But — how could he get up there? The front door was locked. If he broke in, he'd have to deal with another group of cops — and that was too risky.

What could he do? To get to the eighteenth floor, he'd have to get into the building, open the elevator, go. . .

Stern shook his head. It wasn't worth it. He flexed his muscles and looked up the side of the building. It wasn't too high; it could be done. Stern squeezed his fingers together and began the climb up the sheer side of the great building.

It was nearly half an hour later that John Stern pulled himself up

outside the eighteenth floor of the suite occupied by Matt Skardoth.

Hanging precariously by his fingertips, he looked inside the brightly illuminated window. Inside, he saw Matt Skardoth watching Elizabeth Kirk, who was tightly bound to a chair in the corner of the room.

"It's too bad your hero's been killed," Skardoth said. "Because now there's no one to rescue you."

"What are you going to do to me, Skardoth?" he heard the girl ask.

"Unfortunately, you've found out too much about my plans, you and that John Stern. If word got back to the Federation — " Skardoth shook his head. "No. I'll have to silence you the way I did him."

Stern clamped his lips together. *So I'm silenced, eh?* He tightened his grasp on the ledge, pulled himself up, kicked at the window.

The glass burst inward in a tinkling shower. Stern catapulted himself through the shattered window, and in one quick bound he leaped on Skardoth and knocked the big man sprawling to the floor.

Skardoth rolled over and bashed a fist upward. Stern gave with the blow, sucked in his breath, and raked his fist into Skardoth's teeth.

Skardoth tried to stand up, but

another fist smashed into him, smearing his nose across his face like so much putty. Another fist, and then another hit the dark faced man. He collapsed as though he had been clubbed by a baseball bat.

Stern stood over the fallen man, clenching and reclenching his fists. He could hardly hear his own words, but he knew they were words of imprecation.

After a moment, he turned, to look at Elizabeth.

He walked over and took the magneclamps off her wrists.

"What are you going to do now, Johnny?" she asked as she flexed her wrists.

Stern looked bleakly at the mangled figure on the floor.

"I'd like to kill him. It's because of him that you and I have been condemned to die here." Then he stopped and grinned. "On the other hand, if we could find the ship he's been using to get from here to the stars, we could find a little world of our own; we could — "

She stood up then, and smiled at him. "Yorkan Varr, we know you're innocent. There's no need for you to run"

"We?" he asked. "Who's we? I simply did my duty; I only — "

"Shhhh!" she interrupted. "The Council of Judges has known for a long time that this planet needed

correction. But, according to the law, the Judges couldn't interrupt. They sent me first, and then you. It took both of us to do the job."

Stern heard a slight hum outside the window of the eighteenth floor suite. When he looked out, he saw the vague outline of an interstellar

patrol ship. A man in a Patrol uniform stuck his head in the window.

"I understand we have a prisoner to pick up," he said.

Stern put one arm around the girl and gestured with his free hand. "There he is, chum. Pick him up."

THE END

★ *Age Of Abundance?* ★

NO science fiction writer has explored with the clarity and logic necessary, an idea, the germination of which we are just beginning to detect. Some time (this idea is) in the not-too-distant future, technology is going to be able to supply every human being on Earth with all his material wants!

Fantastic? Of course. But it is conceivable that this could happen. Not in our lifetimes, but . . .

What happens to our economic structure when this millenium arrives? What motivates human beings? How can a society be organized which requires almost no effort for survival?

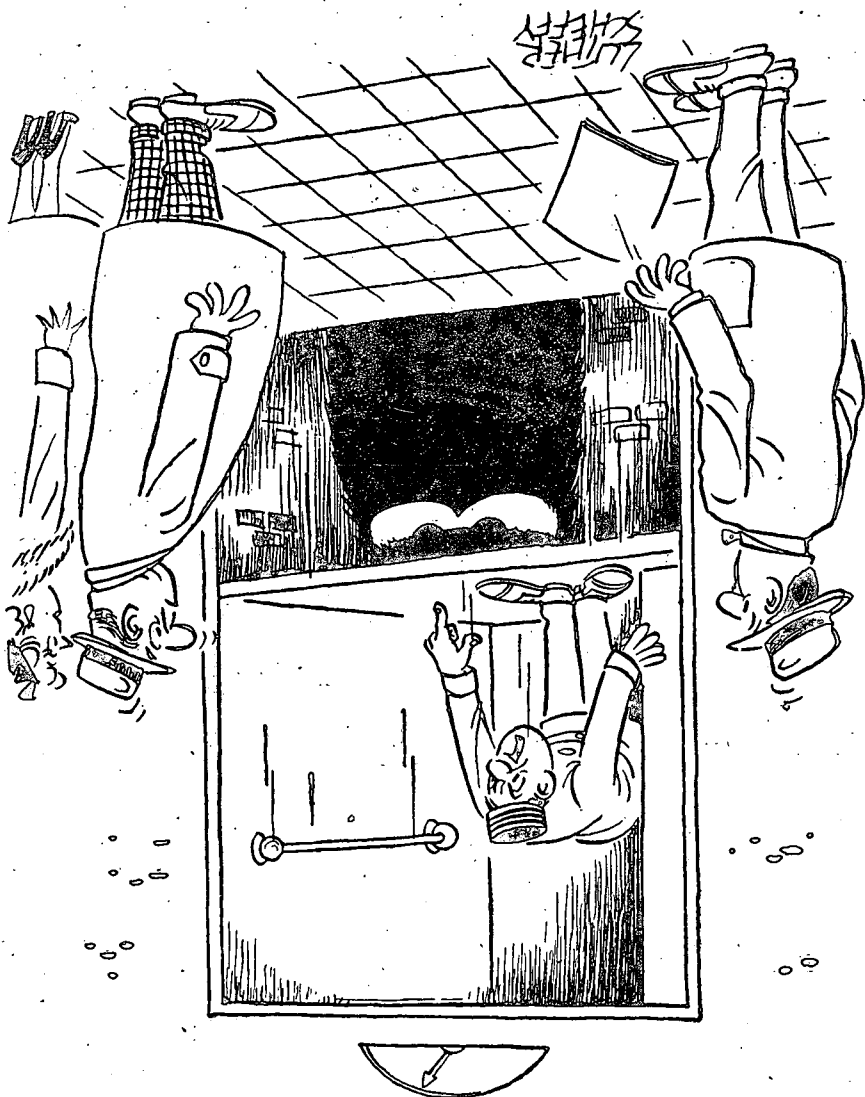
Many science fiction authors have treated futures, in which this state of affairs existed, in which technology has taken care of all Man's wants. But no writer has ever given serious regard to the social structure of such a society. When you speculate upon such a world, your head spins; the possibilities

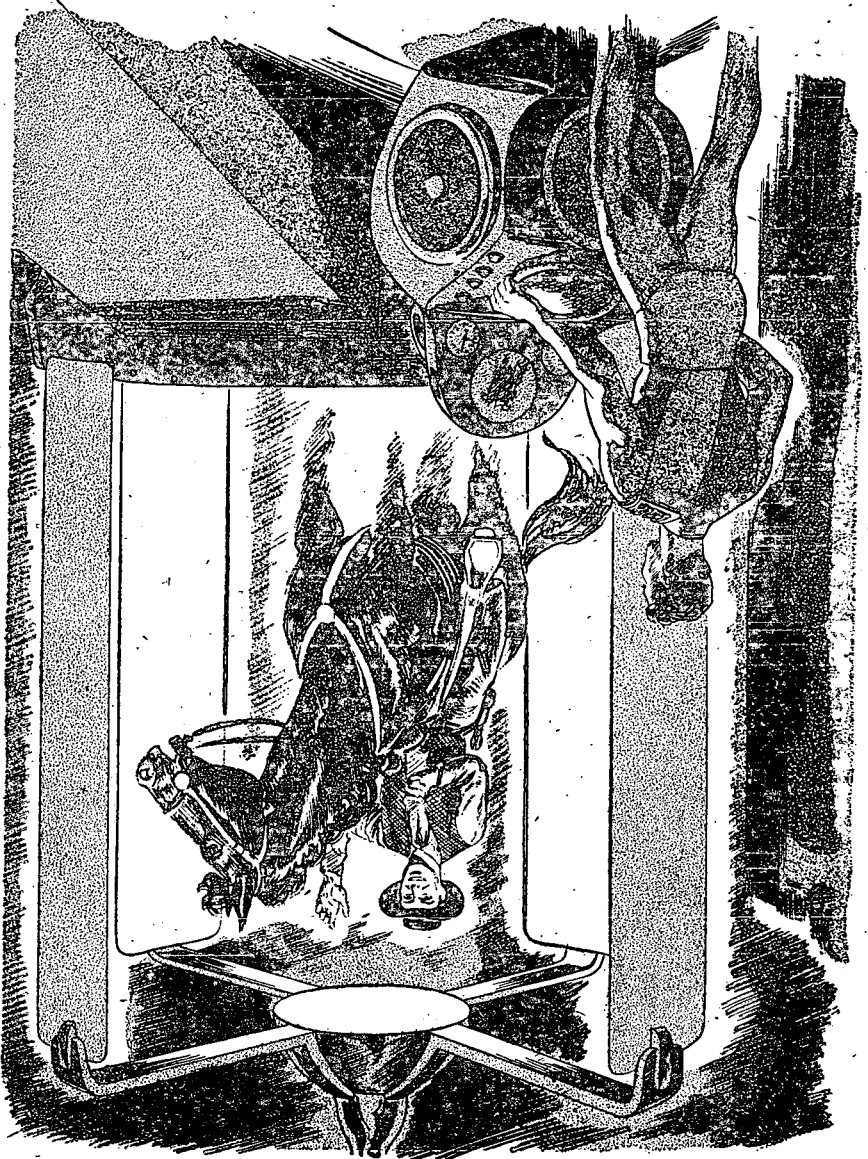
in terms of story plot are almost limitless.

If this idea were solely a suggestion to science fiction writers, it might not be worth considering in any detail. However, the fact of the matter is, that technology is eventually going to create just that situation. We can already see the beginnings of it. Many, many things can now be made in such abundance that they cannot be consumed. Automation promises to push the speed and cheapness of producing goods to fantastically low levels. Goods are becoming so standardized that there is little difference in the common things. The things used by the poorest people really differ very little in quality from those used by the very richest!

The speculation is so heady it is hard to take hold of, but it is indeed ripe for the fertile mind of a good science-fictioneer. What a world—good or bad!

"Down! I said DOWN!"





Tampering with events of the past could bring disastrous results in the future. It was why Brek was given a pair of sixguns to catch—

THE TIME SNATCHER

by

Randall Garrett

“WE’RE IN A HELL of a jam, Brek,” the Councillor said. “If Sagginer isn’t stopped, he’ll change history. The situation’s desperate.”

Time Patrolman Brek Halliday nodded in agreement. It *was* a tense situation. Time travel, he knew, was possible only so long as the traveller into the past did nothing that would change history significantly; the time stream itself would straighten out little changes in the past so that overall history would remain the same.

But a big change was something else again. If you stick your finger in a river, there are a few ripples around it, but the flow of the river remains the same. If you build a dam, though . . .

“When is he?” Brek asked. “Do we know?”

“Fortunately, yes. He forced one of our operators to use one of the

chronokinetic projectors, and then kidnapped her and took her with him. But he didn’t know that the power drain was measurable and had been recorded on the meters. We know how much energy he used, so we know how far into the past he went. We’ve got him pinpointed in the area of the old United States, somewhere between 1880 and 1895.”

“Who was the girl he kidnapped?” Brek asked.

The Councillor smiled apologetically. “Dori Clayton.”

The muscles of Halliday’s jaw tightened. “I see,” he said stiffly. “When do I leave?”

“We’ll prepare you immediately. It’s going to be a touchy job to get both of them out of there, so watch yourself.”

“Don’t worry,” Halliday said quietly. “I’ll manage it.” He walked out, eyes hot with rage, thinking

of Dori in Sagginer's clutches. His hands slowly clenched and unclenched as he headed down the long hall.

★ ★ ★

A Time Patrolman's first step in any excursion to the past is to learn the language and the history so well that he can pass as a native. For three days, Brek Halliday lay in the padded tank of a hypnorobot while information was poured into him.

Then he was given his clothes. They consisted of a pair of high-heeled boots made of treated animal skin, a pair of tight trousers woven of blue-dyed vegetable fiber, a shirt of similar material, and a broad-brimmed hat. Other clothing and equipment went into a pack, and a money-belt around Brek's waist carried gold coins that not even an expert could have told from the originals.

The thing that Brek liked best was the fact that he would be allowed to carry weapons openly. Some civilizations of the past didn't permit a citizen to carry guns, but where Brek was going, a man with a pair of six-guns at his hips wouldn't look odd at all.

Brek had ridden a horse three times -- once in the Battle of Agincourt, once at Chickamaugua, and once during a trip from Rome to Ravenna in the Sixth Century. His

fourth horse was saddled a little differently, but he found it easy to handle. He trotted it onto the platform and signalled the operator. There was a brief hum as the chronokinetic projector warmed up. Then there was a sudden surge of power.

Brek's surroundings seemed to vanish into greyness.

Moments later, light swirled around him . . .

PLATA CITY, New Mexico, was enjoying a warm, lazy summer day. No one paid much attention to the stranger who came into town on a very ordinary-looking cayuse, pulled up before the Casa Loma Saloon, and dismounted. He hitched his horse to the rail, looked up and down the street casually, and then strode into the saloon.

"What'll it be, mister?" asked the fat, mustachioed bartender.

"Whiskey," Brek said. "And a little cold beer to follow it. That road from El Paso is hot."

The barman filled the order. "El Paso, eh? That's a right smart ride. Been on the road long?"

"'Bout a week. I don't believe in rushin' nothin'."

"Hey, barkeep!" yelled someone down at the far end. The bartender went, and Brek downed his whiskey. He sipped the beer reflectively.

ly, thinking long and hard.

Jon Sagginer had been convicted once for illegal use of a time machine, and had been sentenced to ten years on Luna. Somehow, he'd managed to escape and, by bluff and daring, actually get control of a Time Patrol Chronokinetic Projector long enough to use it and kidnap the operator, Dori Clayton.

It was bad enough to use the machine, Brek thought darkly, but to take Dori - -

Brek clenched his fists. For kidnapping Dori, Sagginer would take his punishment from Brek, not the law.

The first thing to do was find him. Reading the power flow of a Chronokinetic Projector could only give an approximate location. Sagginer had landed within fifty miles of this spot, and at some time within the past five years - - but where was he now?

And, Brek asked himself - - did he still have Dori with him? *Five years is a long time.*

In the course of a year or two, Sagginer could be a long way from Plata City, but Brek had a hunch that this was his goal. He didn't know he could be traced, and he wasn't prepared for travel.

But - -

Suddenly, a finger tapped his shoulder and he whirled in surprise. He saw a man wearing a big

silver star prominently on his vest.

"Stranger, you'll have to shuck them irons. City ordinance says a man can't carry pistols inside the city limits."

"I notice I ain't the only one with a full gunbelt," Brek said slowly.

The man's eyes narrowed. "Them happens to be John Sager's men, mister, and they all happen to be deputies." His pistol came out suddenly. "I'm orderin' you to take 'em off."

Brek shrugged and unbuckled the belt.

"I ain't lookin' for an argument," he said, handing the gunbelt to the sheriff. But as the sheriff reached for the belt, Brek lashed out with one hand, slapping the other's weapon aside. It skittered across the floor as Brek jerked one of his own guns from the belt and sent the sheriff reeling backward with a blow in the chest.

Several of the other armed men started to reach for their hips, but Brek's icy voice stopped them short. "First man to touch a gun gets lead!"

The sheriff's face grew red. "You've got trouble, stranger."

"Maybe. But them guns is mine."

"You're trying to buck the law," said the sheriff.

Brek grinned. "It's a damn fool

law that needs so many men to enforce it. If you was the only one packin' irons, I might be persuaded to gie 'em to the barkeep here. But as long as everybody is carryin' full holsters, I reckon I don't want to be out of style. I'd look too conspicuous."

Still holding his weapon, he buckled on his belt and walked over to where the sheriff's gun had fallen. Without taking his eyes off of anyone in the room, he squatted and picked it up.

Then he walked back to the sheriff and shoved the six-gun into the lawman's holster. "Don't aim to cause no trouble, sheriff. If you and the rest of these gents will oblige me, I'll ask the barkeep to set us all up a drink."

There was a moment of silence, then the sheriff grinned.

"Reckon I'll take whiskey," he said.

Brek grinned back and put his weapon in its sheath.

It was almost a mistake. As soon as his hand was well away from the gun butt, one of the men at the bar snatched at his six-gun and brought it up to fire.

NO ORDINARY MAN with ordinary guns could have moved fast enough to do anything. But Brek was no ordinary man, and his weapons were far from ordin-

ary; both man and guns were the product of a science far in advance of the nineteenth century.

Brek's hands blurred, and his weapons seemed to leap from their holsters as the little robot mechanisms secreted in their butts responded to the electroneural commands of their owner.

There was a roar of sound as one of the guns spoke.

The gunman's weapon seemed to vanish from his hand. It sailed across the room, banged against the wall, and dropped to the floor. Brek had no compunction against killing a man, particularly in self-defense, but the death of one man might conceivably make radical changes in the future.

As the echoes of the gunshot died away, the gunman howled with pain. The shock of Brek's bullet against the gun had sent needles of pain racing up his arm.

The room was silent. Then the sheriff walked over to the gunman, who was massaging his aching, numbed fingers, and grabbed him by the shirt collar.

He said softly, "When I agree to take a drink with a man, I don't take it lightly when one of my deputies tries to shoot him."

"I figured you wanted to take him after what he had done," the man said sullenly.

"If I had, I'd of done my own

gunslinging." He reached out and yanked the small metal star off the man's vest. "You ain't a deputy any more. If I catch you wearin' guns, I'll run you in - - or shoot you, whichever's handiest."

Still holding his injured hand, the man turned and walked out of the saloon. The sheriff turned around to Brek.

"That was mighty fast and accurate shootin', son. What'd you say your name was?"

"I didn't say yet," Brek said, reholstering his weapons. "But as a matter of fact, it's Ed Calhoun. As I said, I don't want to cause no trouble, but I'm glad to oblige them that comes lookin' for it." He laid a ten-dollar gold piece on the bar. "Here's an eagle, bar-keep. Let's have them drinks."

One of the other men at the bar looked quizzically at the sheriff. "Sheriff, maybe you hadn't ought to of done that to Cactus. How's the boss gonna take it?"

The sheriff looked at him for a moment. Then he looked at the others. "Let's get one thing straight here. John Sager's an important man hereabouts, and I don't deny it. He needs good gunslingers to guard his property, and I'm only too glad to deputize 'em. But, by the Almighty, if a man don't behave himself, if he ain't to be trusted with a gun, then he ain't

goin' to wear a badge as long as I'm sheriff."

He turned to Brek. "I got to uphold the law, son. I asked you to turn them guns in and you wouldn't do it. I'm damned if I'm goin' to try to take 'em away, so there's only one thing to do." He handed Brek the star that he had taken from Cactus. "Hold up your right hand," he said.

HALF AN HOUR later, Brek found himself sitting at a table, drinking beer and talking with the sheriff and a man named Chuck. He'd answered questions about his past with the purely fictitious data that he'd received from the hypnorobot, but all the time his mind had been on the man who was "an important man hereabouts" - - John Sager.

Sager. Sagginer. It could be the same man.

"By the way, Sheriff - - who is John Sager?"

"Owns the bank," the sheriff said. "Got property up on Chloride Flats, too. That's the silver mine district, you know. Bought out a couple of men^e who was failin' in business and then put 'em to work managin' their own stores for him. People around here have a right smart respect for him."

"Friendly sort of fella, eh?"

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as

to say that. He treats people well, gives money to the church and the school, gives a man a job if he's down and out, but I wouldn't say he was a likeable man personally."

"He's odd," said Chuck. "A real queer one. Maybe I shouldn't say it because I work for him, and he's done real proper by me, but - - well, he's a funny one."

Brek raised an eyebrow. "Yeah-How?"

"Well, for one thing, he seems so - - well, *cold*. Like he was a sidewinder or a rattlesnake waitin' for a packrat to come by. He always seems to be figurin' - - calculatin'. He don't smile much, and when he does, it don't look right on him."

"That funny accent of his don't help none," the sheriff chimed in. "It ain't that he can't speak good English, but it sounds funny, the way he says it."

"Been here very long?" Brek asked casually.

"'Bout three years, is all. Done right well by himself, considerin' he didn't have much when he came."

Chuck said: "After bein' robbed and all, it's a caution how he done so well." Then he laughed. "That was downright funny, when you come to think of it."

"Yeah," the sheriff said, grinning. "Him and his sister showed up one night, naked as jaybirds.

A couple of owlhoots had robbed 'em and stripped 'em of everything they had. No horse, no clothes, no nothin'. He was lucky, in a way, though. He had a money belt on him that he managed to hide in a mesquite bush while the bandits wasn't lookin'.

"I was sittin' in my office that night, when I heard a knock at the back door. I opened it, and there was John Sager, all dressed up in his birthday suit and nothin' more. Course, I didn't know who he was - - "

Brek listened closely to the sheriff's story. It all fits in. Sagginer hadn't had time to prepare himself for this era; his speech was strange, and his clothes even stranger. So he'd taken off his clothes and pretended to have been robbed. And his sister?

"What's his sister like?" he asked.

"Pretty," Chuck said, "but she's not too bright. Goes around in a daze most of the time."

Hypnotized! Brek thought. That settled it.

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS later, Brek had all the information he needed.

Sagginer had a double plot in mind - - one which would both set him up permanently and at the same time eliminate any danger from the Time Patrol. Sagginer

knew, of course, where the Great Silver Vein was at Chloride Flats. It wasn't due to be discovered until 1973, but if "Sager" found it, he'd not only be a rich man - - he would so change history that the Time Patrol would be unable to reach him. He would divert the time stream radically by the discovery of such a vast amount of silver.

Brek had presumably spent the night at the Murray Hotel, but he had actually slipped out of his room unseen and made an excursion on foot up Palo Alto Mountain to the big house Sager had erected there.

It was tightly guarded. There would be no chance of getting in there without creating a major disturbance. Cautiously, he crept completely around the house, looking for a break in the guard network. There wasn't any.

In order to get inside, he'd have to get himself invited in. But how?

He returned to the Hotel, headed from there to the Casa Loma, and was sitting in the bar drinking a beer, mulling the problem over, when Chuck came in.

"Ed," the slim man said softly, "it really ain't none of my business, but I thought you ought to know that Cactus is gunnin' for you."

"Thanks, Chuck," Brek said, as Chuck walked over to the other

end of the bar, as if not wanting to be seen with Brek.

It was easy to see what had happened. Cactus had told Sager-Sagginer what had happened in the bar yesterday, including, no doubt, the story about the blinding draw from the hip. Sager probably suspected that Brek was a Time Patrolman and had sent Cactus to shoot him.

Brek moistened his lips, got up, and dropped a coin on the bar. Then he tipped his hat to Chuck and pushed his way through the batwings, heading for Sager's bank.

He knew the game. Sager didn't care whether Cactus got killed or not; what he wanted to do was watch Brek's gunwork, which would give him away as a Patrolman if he depended on the robot pistols.

Brek would have to take a chance.

He reached down and turned off the robot armament. All he had now was a pair of ordinary pistols. Overhead, the noonday sun was coming down strong and hard, and he began to sweat.

Casually, he sauntered down the wide, unpaved street toward the bank. There were a few people strolling idly in the other direction. He moved up against the row of shops, looking in all directions.

No sign of Cactus. He frowned. Brek knew of Cactus' fear of his

lightning draw, and suspected that Cactus would try an ambush. Brek glanced uneasily across the street, over at Bishop's Livery, where a cowpoke was hitching his reins to the rail. It wasn't Cactus.

Then, suddenly, a gun spoke. Brek felt a hot bolt of lead blast its way into his arm, and he staggered dizzily. He glanced up as he struggled to regain his balance, and saw gunsmoke drifting out an open window in the second floor of Sager's Bank. *Cactus*, he thought. He leaped back as another bullet raked the dirt near him. His left arm was warm with his own blood.

The street was silent. Brek leaned against the cool glass of a shop window, waiting, holding his breath.

In a few minutes, a head peered cautiously out the second-story window. Brek tugged at his gun - - it seemed to take forever to get it out with the robot armament shut off - - and fired once.

A man tumbled out the window, bounced off the awning in front of the building, and dropped heavily to the ground. He lay still.

Brek mopped the blood from his arm. His head was starting to swim with pain, and new worries assailed him. He had killed a man, now. Would it change the past? Would he ever reach Dori again? He didn't know. All he knew was the blind-

ing pain in his arm.

HE WAS IN fairly good repair an hour later, though the arm still throbbed a bit. He'd taken it to a local doctor; Sagger would be suspicious if he'd used Quik-Heal on it. He stood in front of the Murray Hotel, methodically packing his few belongings into his saddlebags.

Chuck walked up. "Ed, the boss would like to see you. Sager."

"Sager? What does *he* want?"

"Wants to apologize for what Cactus done. He fired Cactus as soon as he heard about the run-in with the sheriff, so he wants you to know he ain't responsible. Cactus had no business layin' for you from that bank window."

Brek shrugged. "Might as well go," he said. "I never figured Sager was behind it anyway."

He headed to the bank. Sager was sitting behind his desk, flanked by a couple of his gunmen. He was a lean, long-nosed man with cold eyes and a narrow, thin-lipped mouth.

"You are Ed Calhoun?"

Brek nodded.

"I want you to know that I am sorry for what my ex-employee did. I do not like that sort of thing." Sager's speech was stiff and formal, Brek noted.

"I figured he was on his own," he said easily. "I didn't know of no-

thin' you might have against me."

"There is nothing, I assure you. I understand you are leaving Plata City."

"Yep. I'm headin' for Arizona - - cattle country. I'm a cowman by trade."

"You are also a very good man with a gun. I need men like you. How would you like to work for me?"

It had worked, Brek thought exultantly. Pretending to be about to leave town had removed all suspicion from Sager's mind.

"Why, I reckon I might stay if the pay was good," Brek said thoughtfully. "Long as a man makes a livin', it don't matter much *what* he does."

"I will make it well worth your while, Mr. Calhoun."

Brek drew his breath in sharply, fighting the temptation to shoot Sager where he sat. It would eradicate one considerable blotch on the human race, but it would also involve killing others and it still wouldn't get Dori out of that house.

"Reckon I'll listen to your proposition, anyhow, Mr. Sager."

IT WAS THREE DAYS before Brek was asked up to the house. He knew his time was running low. If Sager actually started mining operations on his property, his death or disappearance wouldn't

stop it. Someone else would find the Great Silver Vein, and the time-stream would be unalterably diverted, causing incalculable change in the world of the future.

Brek's opening was a lucky one - - a prowler had been caught, a Mexican itinerant shot and killed by a guard. It had apparently scared Sager, who probably suspected the Mexican might have been a Time Patrolman, and so he had decided to increase the guard around his house. Brek was called from his bank duties and taken up Palo Alto Mountain to the Sager mansion. His job was to patrol the grounds.

That evening, as dusk fell, Brek strolled around the grounds, going from one of the posted guards to another.

"Sam? It's me, Ed."

"Howdy, Ed. Seen anything?"

"Not a thing. You?"

"Nope. I think the boss is just jumpy."

Brek poured tobacco into a cigarette paper, rolled it deftly, and put it in his mouth. "Got a light, Sam?"

"Sure."

As the guard struck the match, Brek leaned forward to light his cigarette - - and, at the same time, he put his hand on the other's shoulder. Automatically, a little device in his palm silently and painlessly injected hypnotene into the man's

blood stream.

After a moment, Brek said: "How do you feel, Sam?"

Sam blinked slowly. "Just fine."

"You'll do anything I tell you - - won't you, Sam?"

"Why sure, Ed. Whatever you say."

Brek grinned savagely. "You won't hear any noise from the house."

"No noise from the house," Sam agreed.

"No matter what happens, you won't hear anything out of the ordinary, or see anything out of the ordinary. This will seem just like any other night to you."

Under the influence of the drug, Sam nodded in agreement.

"And you won't remember what I just said. All you'll remember is that I bummed a light and went on."

Again Sam nodded.

"Well, so long, Sam."

"So long, Ed," said Sam tonelessly.

The same process, with variations, was repeated with the rest of the guards. When he was finished, Brek fired his gun into the air and strode boldly up to the front door. He rapped.

"Who is there?" asked a voice from within.

"Ed Calhoun, Boss. We just killed another prowler. You want to take a look at him?"

A pause. Then "Are you sure he is dead?"

"Bullet through his head," Brek said.

"What does he look like?"

"Ordinary. Might be an Indian."

The door opened, and Sager stepped straight into a right upper-cut which bowled him back through the opening. Brek charged in after him, but the man lay limp, his eyes closed.

Brek stood over him for a moment, debating what to do. Then he heard footsteps on the stairway.

Dori.

She stared at him, no recognition in her eyes. A chill of horror ran through him as he saw what Dori had become.

"Who are you?" Her voice was dull, uncaring.

He walked over to her and looked at her eyes. Burning fury rose in him. Using hypnotene, Sager had made Dori only the shell of the girl he had loved.

"Who are you?" she asked again. "I do not know you."

"You once did," he said tightly. "You - -"

He felt a sudden blow on the back of his neck, and his knees sagged. Sager had been feigning unconsciousness, and now had returned to the struggle at a moment when Brek was unprepared.

A fist smashed into his side, and

he ducked away, blinking away the pain. He turned and advanced toward Sagginer, while Dori moaned wordlessly in the corner.

Sagginer jumped forward and drove a fist toward Brek's jaw, but Brek countered and felt knuckles crash through the time-jumper's teeth. As Sagginer rocked, Brek hit him below the heart, and he grunted and folded up.

This time Brek made sure of the job. He continued pummelling Sagginer's senseless body until he was out of breath, then stood up and looked at Dori.

She was huddled helplessly in a chair, sobbing in terror. Brek scowled as he remembered the girl he had once known, and gave the unconscious form of Sagginer another kick. Then he slid his gun out of its holster and pressed a button on the underside of the robot gunbelt.

The time-scoop closed around the three of them.

WHEN THE GREYNESS cleared away, Brek stumbled out of the timescoop and saw the Councillor waiting for him, smiling.

He shook his head to clear it. "Here I am," he said. "And here's your time-snatcher. Mission accomplished, sir."

"Very fine job, Brek. Very fine."

Brek looked at the Councillor. "There's one problem, though. The girl, Dori - -"

He saw the Councillor blink apprehensively. "Oh, I brought her back, all right," he said quickly. "But - - but - - she's been badly treated, sir. I don't know if the damage Sagginer's done to her mind can ever be repaired. I - -"

The Councillor's eyes widened. "What are you talking about, Brek? What has happened to Dori? I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean."

"Why, she's right here - - unconscious, in the back of the Time Scoop," Brek said, puzzled. "And - -" He turned to find the girl. "Why - - she *isn't* here!"

"Of course not," said the Councillor. "She's been right here, all the time. Where else should she be?"

Dimly, Brek began to realize what had happened. Some act of his - - the shooting of Cactus, perhaps - - had altered the future, his present, ever so slightly. Just enough so that in *this* present, Sagginer had gone back alone - - *without* Dori.

A door opened, and a girl stepped out, clad in a white lab smock. Her eyes were bright and clear, and when she saw Brek, she gave a little scream of joy.

Then Brek folded her into his arms.



Conducted by Robert Bloch

WANT TO HEAR a convention report? Okay, here goes.

The Fourteenth World Science Fiction Convention was held at the Biltmore Hotel in New York from August 31st through September 3rd, 1956.

There. You've had your report. You want more?

All right, you're entitled to it. As a matter of fact, editor Bill Hamling (*with* to his intimate friends) extended the deadline of this column an extra three weeks just so that I'd be able to include a full account of the Convention for you. "Remember," he told me, "I really mean it when I say I want a full account. Knowing you as I do, this shouldn't be any trouble - - you're always full of Conventions anyhow." He further impressed upon me the fact that money was no ob-

ject. "Don't spare expenses," he said, generously. "After all, you're paying for it yourself."

I needed no further urging. I took off by plane from Milwaukee on the night of August 30th, and the following morning we landed at International Airport. The stewardess unlocked my safety-belt and let us both out, and I stepped forth. Reclaiming my luggage - - and making sure that its cork hadn't fallen out - - I made my way through the teeming terminal and was greeted by Martin Greenberg, a Gnome from the Press of the same name.

From that point on, it's all a question of name-dropping and rather than list twelve or thirteen hundred names, I'd prefer to get serious for a moment and discuss Conventions as a whole. So if you'll forgive me, I'll omit mention of the formal events, my personal adven-

tures and misadventures, and devote a few words to a general reaction.

From the standpoint of attendance, the Fourteenth World Science Fiction Convention was a terrific success. It brought together well over a thousand people from all over the world, turned them loose in one of the biggest hotels in the largest city of the nation, and gave them an opportunity to meet and mingle freely for four frantic days (and even more frantic nights.) Virtually every editor and publisher in the science fiction field attended or was represented. Artists, writers, BNFs and neos were present in plethoric plenitude.

As usual, the Convention Committee labored mightily. I doubt if the average attendee realizes just how much plain hard work, aggravation, frustration and nerve-racking crisis was their lot. Chairman Dave Kyle didn't sleep for three solid days and nights. Dick Ellington, Ruth Landis, Pat Werner, Art Saha, Frank Dietz - - to name only a few of those who worked ceaselessly behind the scenes - - did yeoman labor. Whenever I turned around, there was Dick crouched over the Registration Desk, or Ruth running messages or Pat chasing down a speaker. The personal sacrifices of the Committee were self-evident.

But, as stated above, it is doubtful if the average attendee is fully aware of all the problems involved in running a full scale Convention of this magnitude.

And the reaction of a number of average attendees seems to run like

this:

"Sure, it was fun, but I expected more. What became of all those big-name speakers they promised us? And how come there was no premiere of a science fiction movie? Why did the programs start late and run overtime? Why did we get pushed around outside the banquet hall and why couldn't they have found a bigger room for the cocktail party? What was the matter with the elevator service? Why did the hotel close its coffee-shop all weekend? And with all those people there, how come the Convention Committee went into the hole and had to pass the hat?"

To all these queries there is only one answer: the Convention was run by amateurs.

And to all these problems there seems to be only one solution: future Conventions should be run by professionals. Not professional science-fictioneers, necessarily, but professional Conventioneers.

The amateur-run Science Fiction Convention has a long and honorable history. In the days when attendance was limited to two or three hundred, it was possible to control the situation with a comparative minimum of error and confusion. A small hotel could handle the sheer mechanics of feeding, housing and conveying the Convention group to and from its meetings. The Committee could forget about such matters and devote most of its time to the actual program. Moreover, a small Convention has an intimacy all its own. Because of its limited size and scope, there is a general air of tolerance and a lack of pretension.

When things go awry, nobody makes too much of a fuss. The program is almost an impromptu matter. There is no great financial outlay involved, and no great expectation on the part of the average attendee.

But when our Conventions top the thousand mark in their attendance, everything changes. A big hotel is involved, and a big program is deemed mandatory. Big promises are made, a big financial risk is entailed. And the ensuing problems and disappointments can be big, too.

LET'S CONSIDER, briefly, the nature of the reactions cited previously and see just what happened in New York.

"Sure, it was fun, but I expected more."

Of course the average attendee expected more. He had been *promised* more. But this business of securing big-name speakers requires time and effort - - more time and effort than an amateur Committee can possibly hope to invest in a single aspect of a four-day program. The same goes for dealing with major film studios and getting them to provide a new movie.

And an amateur Committee is not expected to be familiar with the problems of human engineering. A moment's thought will tell you that when you get 1300 people in a hall on the 19th floor they'll need elevator service in order to get downstairs again. When the program is over, they all want to go down at the same time - - and two elevators won't do the job. As a result, there's bound to be a general slowdown. The mere physical

problem of getting people in and out of the Convention Hall and allowing them time for meals between sessions is going to bring about a delay. As a result, the program will run behind.

And when a hotel closes its sole low-priced eatery, the majority of Conventioneers must go outside in search of food. Result: a further delay.

Again, there's the simple matter of *enough room*. If a large crowd is to be herded into corridors to wait for admission to a closed session, or herded into a room for cocktails - - then corridor and room must be adequate to hold that crowd and hold it in comfort.

All this looks very simple on paper, and in retrospect. But we must remember once again that such matters constitute only a fraction of the problems confronting a Convention Committee. They are concerned with a thousand and one details of operation and administration: of printing and registering and assembling and distributing and programming and liason and coordination.

And because of the tradition of small Conventions, there is a general tendency to believe that such matters just "take care of themselves." The speakers show up, the hotel provides service, the show goes on.

But mathematical progression enters into the picture, and what works out, somehow, when 300 people are involved just doesn't work when you're handling 1300.

The same applies to finances. The bigger the turnout, the more money involved. The more money involved, the easier it is to go in

the hole - - unless the whole fiscal policy is handled by people who have had experience in just such matters.

Again we come back to the point - - if we're to have big Science Fiction Conventions in the future, we need *professional* assistance.

It is not fair to load a group of volunteers with the staggering responsibilities of running a huge affair for four full days, and then blame them if things go wrong.

Conversely, it is not fair to bring together 1300 attendees who lay out a sizeable sum of money in the expectation of a gala event and then disappoint them.

And beyond the question of fairness, there's the matter of simple common-sense.

No other group, association or organization in the country would ever dream of attempting to stage a full-scale Convention of this sort without professional direction.

They realize it just can't be done.

The usual procedure is to seek out the services of a professional Convention Secretary - - a man who makes a full-time, year-round business of representing various groups holding annual meetings. He generally has a dozen or more such organizations as clients, and he has the experience to do the job. He knows how to approach speakers, secure concessions, get publicity, bargain with a hotel, make sure of adequate accommodations, delegate authority, work with the Committee representing the group's membership. He can deal with the headaches and the heartaches - - and minimize them.

Who pays his salary? Generally,

he takes a flat fee - - obtained from a percentage of registration dues. There are a dozen different ways of insuring his services. And since he is a paid employee, there's no question of his cooperation. Our Conventions could and would continue to be *directed* by the fan-group in charge for that particular year. The policies and the spirit of the Conventions would be unchanged. But the *problems* would be shifted to other shoulders.

The time has come, I believe, to be realistic. Our Science Fiction Conventions serve two purposes: we hold them for fun, and we hold them - - whether we like it or not - - as "showcases" for the field.

If we want fun, there's no question but that the best way to obtain it is to eliminate the foulups and the fuss: quit burdening a few people with enormous workloads and quit burdening a lot of people with the possibility of disappointment. If we want to "showcase" our hobby, then by all means we need a professionally-planned schedule and program which will make a good impression on press and public alike.

The only other alternative is to abandon the "big" Convention entirely and rely on the "regional" Convention - - Westerncon, Midwestcon, Metrocon, etc.

There are those, of course, who would prefer this solution. But those of us who want to see science fiction *grow*, and gain in stature, realize the importance of the Big Ones. These affairs attract newcomers to the field, and serve to interest potential fans in the hobby.

I had fun in New York. I appreciate the earnest effort of the

Convention Committee. I believe that there were ample rewards for attendees to offset the losses. And my criticism is levelled solely at a situation which has arisen. We face the problem of Bigness. And the time has come to seek solutions. Either we operate in the future as all groups must operate, or we run the risk of reaching the point where no amateur organization will take on the responsibility. And after 17 years of growth, we'll find ourselves back in the days where Conventions began - - and ended - - as "Gashwowboyoboy!" gatherings of the Beanie Brigade.

There undoubtedly are many other viewpoints and many other suggestions for solution. At any rate, it's something worth thinking about.

NOW, IN THE BRIEF space remaining, let's look at the midsummer and late-summer crop of fanzines. It is a shame to use agricultural terms for such cultural products, but three years of living in the country has made me more of a farmer than Phil.

First off, a few revivals. Here is STELLAR (Ted E. White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va.: irreg., 15c) which is actually edited by Larry Stark. This 'zine was formerly titled ZIP, but apparently lost that quality after seven issues. Now it has been revived, with the purpose of printing fiction by and about fans. The present issue is therefore a somewhat novel experiment, and highly interesting. For some odd reason I best enjoyed the poem, *Rosebud*, which concludes the 34-page presentation.

Out of the west comes SHANGRI LA, (Paul Turner, 1884 Stanley

Ave., Long Beach, Calif: irreg., no price listed) which celebrates its 15th birthday with this issue - - the first in about three years. This periodical is the organ of the Los Angeles SF Society, and the highlight of the 'zine is an account of the Westercon by Forrest J. Ackerman. No need to comment on his perspicacity - - Ackerman's acumen is well known.

Also from the shores of Long Beach drifts in a copy of FAFHRD (Ron Ellik, 277 Pomona Ave., Long Beach 3, Calif.: irreg., free, for letters of comment or exchange-basis) and features - - among other interesting items - - reports on Swedish science-fiction and Belgian fandom. If you wish to take stock of the situation in Stockholm or find out what sprouts in Brussels, this is for you.

FANZINE TIME (Michael B. Hinge, 100 Atkin Ave., Mission Bay, Auckland, New Zealand: irreg., no price) features colored illos on glossy stock and much speculative material on UFO.

The editor would appreciate material and comments from the States, so here's your chance to become internationally famous.

Internationalists will also find much of interest in the present output of British fanzines. Those recently received include ORION (Paul Enever, 9 Churchill Ave., Hillingdon, Middx., England: bi-monthly, 35c. a year) and TRIODE (Terry Jeeves and Eric Bentcliffe: quarterly, 7 for \$1, subs. to Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn.). Both feature material by John Berry, plus a wide variety of other matter. TRIODE has a page of photos from the Ket-

tering Convention, a reprint of the clever tape, *Last and First Fen*, and the 7th installment of Arthur Thomson's equally enjoyable *Future History of Fandom*.

- More Kettering pictures and data can be found in PLOY (Ron Bennett, 7 Southway, Arthurs Ave., Harrogate, Yorks., England: quarterly, 4 for 50c, subs. to Bob Pavlat, 6001 43rd Ave., Hyattsville, Md.). And after an interlineation like that, what more can you say?

Also out of England comes NOW AND THEN (Harry Turner and Eric Needham, 10 Carlton Ave., Romiley, Cheshire, England: irreg., no price). This is an OMPA publication, but worth pursuing even by non-members of that mailing association. John Berry fans will find another juicy morsel here.

Speaking of John Berry fans, they'll be most eager to get hold of recent copies of his RETRIBUTION (John Berry, 1 Knockeden Crescent, Flush Park, Belfast, Northern Ireland: irreg., no price listed). Arthur Thomson is co-editor, and between him and his talented colleague they manage to turn out a humorzine of special stature. It features the fictional exploits of "The Goon" - a slightly bloodshot Private Eye. American "Goon" representatives also contribute their "case-histories" in which they "tell all" and manage to spill more than Spillane.

From somewhat closer to home we have CANADIAN FANDOM (William D. Grant, 11 Burton Rd., Toronto 10, Ont., Canada, quarterly 15c, 8 for \$1) and its fall issues are, as usual, up to the standard set by fourteen years of previous

publication. A special 50c Anniversary Issue containing almost 60,000 words and edited by the combined efforts of the Derelicts of Toronto will probably be available by the time this notice sees print. It will probably be aimed largely at the serious fans - - but then, anybody who pays half a buck for a fanzine certainly deserves to be considered serious.

For free, for nothing, *por nada*, to say nothing of *gratis*, you can obtain (without cost or charge) a past issue of SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: This former giant in the field has since merged with INSIDE, but there's a timeless quality about much of its material - - presented in a handsome offset format. All you are required to do is send your request, together with a stamp, to Roy A. Squires, 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, California.

Also scheduled for release at about this time will be SCIENCE-FICTION FIVE-YEARLY, which is published every 1826 days by Miss Lee Hoffman and Mrs. L. Shaw. Details on cost and availability are not at hand as this is written, but you might try writing the editors c/o Royal Publications Inc. 47 E. 44th Street, New York 17, N. Y. BNF Lee Hoffman and neofan Mrs. Shaw have promised quite a spectacular lineup of talent, and there will probably be the usual filler material by crudzine contributors such as Bob Tucker and Walt Willis.

Speaking of the latter, he has finally produced another issue of HYPHEN (Walter Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland: irreg., 15c) and as usual, it's an Irish Stew which

will interest all Irish students.

France, long-famous for its postcards has just produced a fanzine - - MEUH (Jean Linard, 24 Rue Petit, Vescul, Hte. Sne., France: irreg., 10c). It is a *tres formidable* job, too, of 65 pages, and features Continental, British and American fans. If you fall into any of these categories, you'll probably enjoy this issue. The editor welcomes contributions, comment, and correspondence.

IF YOU'VE BEEN wondering what's happened to such fanwriters as Richard Geis and Redd Boggs, you'll find them in OBLIQUE No. 7 (Clifford Gould, 3741 Liggett Drive, San Diego 6, Cal.: irreg., 25c) which also features a really assortment of Californiacs.

If you've been wondering what's happened to Dean Grennell, you might write him at 402 Maple Avenue, Fond du Lac, Wis., for the latest GRUE. 25c brings you a brand new issue, typical, topical and tip-top. It's the usual superior editing job.

And if you've been wondering what's happened to Bob Tucker and his co-editor, send your dime to SCIENCE FICTION WORLD, The Gnome Press, 80 E. 11th St., New York 3, N. Y. The third issue long overdue, is finally out and about and a fourth issue is probably scheduled to make its appearance before this notice sees print. SCIENCE FICTION WORLD features a somewhat novel policy - - its interlineations are all buried in the text, and you have to dig 'em out for yourself. No fair asking the postal inspectors for help.

From the wilds of Norfolk, Nebraska, fan-capital of the Prairie States, come two new issues. EC-LIPSE (Ray Thompson, 410 S. 4th St., Norfolk, Neb.: irreg., 10c) and CONFAB (Bob Peatrowsky, Box 634, Norfolk, Neb.: monthly, gratis) are the two titles in question. And there's no question but that each contains a pleasurable plethora of letters, reviews, and fannish-type articles.

SIGMA OCTANTIS (John Musells, 4 Curve St., Wakefield, Mass.: irreg., ask for sample copy and rates) is a forward-looking publication that is assembled backwards. You read it from right to left, pagewise, and in so doing encounter Neal Wilgus, Kent Moomaw, Frank Kerr, Gerry Labowitz and a generous portion of featured material.

SIGMA OCTANTIS is sponsoring the First Annual Fandom Fiction Contest, with an impressive list of prizes for non-pro winners.

Manuscripts sent to editor Musells will be passed on to Story Editor Al Andrews whose services are available to writers. Judging staff includes Richard Lupoff, Samuel Johnson, Ronald Voigt and Robert Madle. Closing date of the contest is December 31st, but this may be extended. If you're interested, write to editor Musells for full details and prize listing.

While we're passing along information, you fans in the Pittsburgh area are invited to contact the PITTSBURGH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION, which meets every fourth Thursday. It's an active group with its own Clubzine. Get your information from Dirce Archer, 1453 Barnsdale St.,

Pittsburgh 17: Phone HAZel 1-2625.

As we go to press, a few last-minute entries clamor for attention. The aforementioned CANADIAN FANDOM is indeed out and lives up to expectations. And here, at last, is PEON (Charles Lee Riddle, PNC, USN, USS CASCADE AD-16, Fleet Post Office, N. Y., N. Y.: irreg., 15c). The line-up tells its own story - - Ron Smith, Joe Gib-

son, Bob Tucker, James E Gunn, and Jim Harmon's HARMONY plus other features well up to the usual high editorial standards.

Now it's deadline time and I must rush down to the postoffice and turn this column over to the Pony Express.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and I'll see you in 1957!

— Robert Bloch.

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF IMAGINATION, published bi-monthly at Evanston, Illinois for February 1957.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, GREENLEAF PUBLISHING COMPANY, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

Editor, William L. Hamling, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

Managing Editor, Frances Hamling, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

Business Manager, None.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given).

GREENLEAF PUBLISHING COMPANY, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

William L. Hamling, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

Curtis Fuller, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustees or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails, or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only).

WILLIAM L. HAMLING, Editor

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1956.

(SEAL)

S. J. PELZ.

(My commission expires May 27, 1960)

The Incomplete Theft

by

Ralph Burke

Stealing a new space ship principle from Earth seemed like an easy enough task for the alien. But how does one deliver a principle?

TORLYN KHY SMILED grimly to himself as he thought of the approaching completion of the new Earth spaceship. Thus far, his disguise had completely fooled the Earthmen; they didn't even begin to suspect that a Valdorian spy was among the engineers who were building the *Skyjumper*.

High above the spacefield it loomed, a great sphere of metal that housed the new teleportation drive. Torlyn Khy looked up at its impressive bulk. Unlike the common type of spaceship, which had a top speed of ten thousand lights, the new drive could take the ship from Earth to any point in the galaxy in a fraction of a microsecond. If it were successful, Earth would win the war against Valdor in a matter of months.

And if not - -

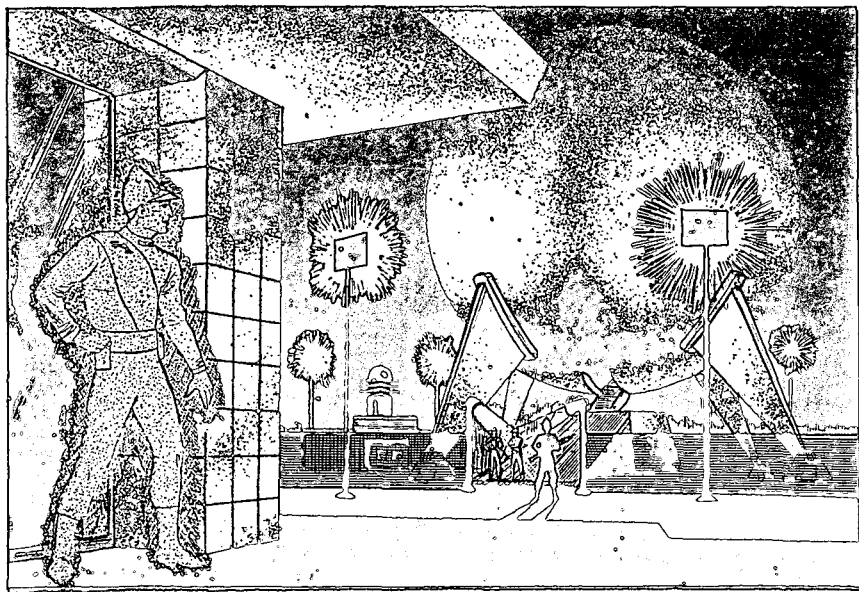
John Mitchell, the Chief Engineer of Sahara Spaceport, said: "She's a beauty, isn't she, Pete?"

Torlyn Khy, in his disguise as Earthman "Peter Blane," smiled and said, "Yes. She's a real beauty. When will she be finished?"

"This afternoon," Mitchell said. "The boys are tightening the last bolts and putting in the final wiring now. The job's just about over, Pete."

Good! thought Torlyn. *I'll be able to take it tonight.* To be able to bring both the spaceship's plans and the ship itself back to Valdor would be a major feat. It would result in a fine promotion.

The ship was entirely different from any other vessel ever built. The hyperkinetic generator in its center generated a spherical force field around the ship which projec-



ted it to wherever it had been aimed for.

It was simple to operate; all the pilot had to do was set up the co-ordinates of his target, turn on the hyperkinetic generator, and press the activator button. The generator itself did the rest. The field enclosed the ship, and instantaneously the ship was a hundred or a thousand light-years away.

* * * *

That evening, Torlyn Khy stepped out of his room and strolled over toward the spaceship. It was surrounded by guards, and it was bathed in the blaze of a battery of searchlights, but that did

not bother the Valdorian. Earthmen were such stupid fools! It would be a blessing for them if the Valdorians took them over and showed them how to run their lives efficiently. On Valdor, everyone had a job and he did it. He obeyed his superiors without asking questions, and the society, therefore, was efficient.

But these Earthmen! Such a lax, sloppy, inefficient society! They needed more regimentation, more precision. They needed to learn to obey orders. And they *would* learn --- after the Valdorian victory.

"Evening, Mr. Mitchell."

"Good evening, Captain. Nice

night, isn't it?"

Torlyn Khy looked around warily and saw the lean, spare figure of John Mitchell standing some distance away. He was talking to a man in a military uniform, one of the guards posted on the project. The Valdorian ducked away; he didn't care to be seen. Not tonight, of all nights.

He walked all around the spaceship, studying it carefully from all angles, keeping well out of sight of the guards that surrounded it.

The ship appeared to be ready to go; all he had to do was get inside and take off. Simple. Very simple, Torlyn Khy thought. The greatest victories are always simple.

The ship was supposed to be lifted above the atmosphere on her jets before the hyperkinetic generator was used, but the generator could, in an emergency, be used on the ground. Torlyn Khy smiled. As far as he was concerned, this *would* be an emergency. The Earthmen, he thought pleasantly, would feel very foolish when their greatest ship simply vanished from under their noses.

After making a thorough reconnaissance of the area, the Valdorian decided he was ready. He switched on the tiny power pack at his waist, and the invisibility

belt he was wearing was energized. If anyone had been watching the shadows where Torlyn Khy was standing, they would have seen a faint blue glow as the Valdorian faded slowly from sight.

Then, boldly, the alien strode toward the *Skyjumper*. Nothing stood in the way of success now.

HE WALKED DIRECTLY across the well-lighted safety area, and the guards paid not the slightest attention.

At the airlock door, he paused to take stock of the situation. He had to move fast now. The success of the whole mission depended on timing from here on out. The guards, naturally, would see the airlock door swing open; they would know something was wrong. It would take them, he estimated, about four minutes to bring up heavy armament to blast the door open.

Moistening his lips nervously, he decided to correct the estimate. *Better make it three minutes for safety's sake*, he thought.

In that time, he would have to warm up the generator and punch the coordinates for the planet Valdor into the big guiding computer. Doing that would require, say, two minutes - - giving him a minute's leeway. Good!

He waited until the guards all

seemed to be looking away from the airlock door. Then he pressed the lock. The door swung open, and Torlyn Khy stepped quickly inside.

There was a shout from one of the guards below, but they were too late to do anything; the Valdorian had the airlock door closed before they could see what had happened. He turned the master switch on the inside of the door, which locked the door against any outside interference.

He grinned sardonically. The fool Earthmen would have a devil of a time doing anything now!

The next thing was to switch off his invisibility belt. It was difficult to do delicate work if you couldn't see your own arms and fingers, and punching co-ordinates into a computer was a delicate job.

He turned toward the inner door - - and, at that moment, the door opened! An Earthman stepped out, an engineer named Harris who had apparently been making some last-minute adjustments on the ship.

"Oh, hello, Blaine," Harris said. "I - -"

Without a word, the Valdorian leaped forward, taking the Earthman by surprise. He slammed his fist into Harris' abdomen, and he doubled up in pain.

Torlyn Khy jumped back as the

Earthman's foot suddenly sliced toward him. The toe of the engineer's foot hit him stingingly alongside the jaw, but the Valdorian managed to grasp the foot and twist.

Then he bent and picked Harris up, and knocked him down again with a crashing blow to the chin.

He left the unconscious Earthman on the floor, locking him inside the airlock. He would be no trouble there.

The real trouble was that the fight had delayed his timing; it must have taken all of a minute, and in a split-second operation such as this an interval of a minute could be fatal. Without wasting any more time, he got moving. His jaw hurt where the Earthman had slugged him, and his fingers felt stiff.

He ran down the corridor to the control room. The big automatic computer was ready to go. Torlyn Khy switched it on, waited for a moment, and then hastily began punching co-ordinates into the computer. He had to hurry; the Earthmen might blast their way into the ship at any moment. Still, he dared not make an error; if he did, the ship might end up a thousand light-years from where it was supposed to materialize - - perhaps in the heart of a sun.

There was perspiration dripping from his brow by the time he was finished. He turned on the hyperkinetic generator and waited for it to warm up. Still there was no sound from the airlock.

A red indicator light on the control panel came on, telling him that the generator was ready. With a triumphant smile, Torlyn Khy reached out and pressed the activator stud.

OUTSIDE THE SHIP, the guards watched the airlock door.

"I wonder why Dr. Harris did that?" said a lieutenant.

"Who knows?" a sergeant replied.

They had seen the airlock open and close, but knowing that Harris was still inside, they had thought little of it. Still, it was odd.

The airlock door swung open again. Harris stepped out, looking

dazed. The lieutenant ran toward him, and quickly the engineer explained what had happened.

"You mean he's inside there? We've got to stop him!"

"It's too late," Harris said. "He didn't know that I was doing some adjusting inside there. Go ahead and look."

The lieutenant went to the inner door of the airlock and peered in. The whole inside of the ship was gone, vanished as though it had never been.

"I had just made a slight adjustment of the generator," Harris said quietly. "The power field was cut down, so the projector field was smaller. I'm afraid our spy simply projected the inside of the spaceship out into the interstellar vacuum and left the hull behind."

He shook his head grimly. "Poor devil. He'll have quite a surprise in store for him - unless he can live without air!"

THE END



Weird Geometrics



OF all the branches of mathematics, none can be better appreciated nor more easily understood by the layman than geometry. From the familiar geometry of Euclid, a student is led down strange byways through the weird geometries of Riemann, Lobachewsky, and Minkowski to the geome-

try of the future, topology.

Topology is the study of geometry which dispenses entirely with any such concepts as length, shape, size or any other of those properties so familiar to the things we know. It is simply the study of geometric figures after all their familiar properties have been re-

moved. For example, you might ask for the topological properties of a triangle or a circle. In topology a triangle is identical to a circle and in fact, any closed, simple curve is the same as any other. Thus it is impossible to distinguish between simple closed curves. They are the elements of topology.

The Klein bottle with no inside and no outside, the Moebius strip, with only one surface, the pseudosphere, these are the materials of non-Euclidean topology. The funny thing about topology is that it is apparently the mathematical subject which promises a great deal for the future.

Very clearly it can be seen that the mathematical advances of the near future are most likely to come from a study of topology. Already for example, in the theory of the complex variable, topology has provided simple answers to problems which for a long time seemed insoluble.

For a long time in recent mathematics geometry has been a sort of neglected, weaker sister to the powerful techniques of analysis and algebra. Topology however today is proving to be the provider of answers that can be offered by no other mathematical method. Euclid has been vindicated!



"Sure I'm a Martian — what did you expect?"

Thornwald had done his tour of duty for the
Solar Service; now it was time for him to retire
But a life of relaxation would not be simple on—

Bleekman's Planet

by

Ivar Jorgensen

LOOKING AROUND cautiously, Mac Thornwald eased himself down from the window ledge where he had been crouching. It was less than a ten-foot drop, but because of the pain in his left ankle he didn't dare to drop too heavily. His right leg would have to take the brunt of the shock.

As he struck the plastosteel pavement, he clamped his lips together to cut short the moan of pain that welled up as his left foot twisted under him.

He staggered a little and then straightened to look around. No one had heard anything. The city around him was still silent. He still had a chance. Only the ghostly whispers of the air-reptiles drifting through the sky could be heard.

Taking a deep breath, he reholstered the pistol he was clutch-

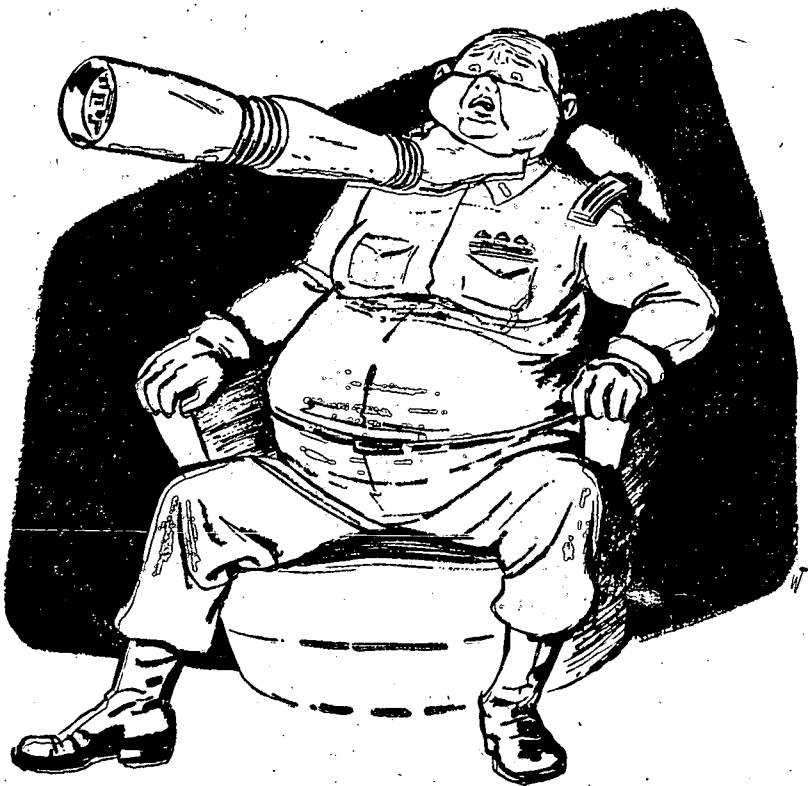
ing and began limping up the dark street toward the Governor's Mansion.

Eventually, the numbing pain began to leave his foot. The stun beam had hit the nerves near the ankle, but the effect wore off after several minutes of walking. *Okay*, he thought. *I'm back in business again.* The Governor of Bleekman's Planet had reckoned wrong when he tried to take personal property away from an ex-Patrolman.

* * *

MacKenzie Thornwald had landed on Bleekman's Planet less than eight hours before. He was a young man, tall and dark and hard-looking, with the deep tan of the veteran spaceman. Ten years with the Interstellar Police had strengthened him and taught him to take care of himself.

He'd still be in the service ex-



cept for the loss of his left arm, which had been burned off by a Mark X rifle during a skirmish. It had earned Thornwald a medal and a fat retirement pension. So he had decided to take it easy for the rest of his life.

He had picked Bleekman's Planet. It was well out of the more civilized areas of the Galaxy, a frontier planet out on the Rim.

Bleekman's Planet had, as yet, only one city — Velliston.

The setup had looked good. There was money to be made on a frontier planet, away from the main stream of Galactic civilization. Mac Thornwald had wanted to settle down in a small, sparsely-populated area and just take it easy the rest of his life. And Bleekman's Planet had looked

like just the place.

He couldn't have been wronger. Trouble started the moment he got off the space shuttle from the liner.

"Here you are, pal," the shuttle pilot said. "All set?"

"Sure," Thornwald said. He scooped up his baggage with his one good arm and walked down the ramp. Behind him, the shuttle blasted off, heading back to the mother ship above. Thornwald paused at the landing, with his suitcase dangling from his arm and his trunk at his side, looking at the Bleekman's Planet Spaceport.

"Over here, you," said a cold voice.

Thornwald glanced over and saw two men approaching him in uniform. "We're the customs inspectors," the taller of the two said. "We'll have to look at your baggage."

"Fair enough," Thornwald said. "You'll find I'm not carrying anything prohibited. I'm coming here to settle."

"We'll decide whether your stuff's okay," the smaller inspector said. The two men hoisted Thornwald's baggage and carried it to the depot. Thornwald followed.

"Let's have the keys," the tall one ordered. Mac handed over the keys and they opened the trunk. The first thing they discovered

was Thornwald's prosthetic arm.

"What's *this*?" The inspector's voice registered shock.

"Haven't you ever seen a prosthetic arm? I lost mine in combat, and this is my spare."

The inspector's eyes narrowed. "How come you're not wearing it, then?"

"It's thought-attuned. It's controlled directly from my neural centers, and the linkage isn't completely smooth yet. It takes time to learn how to use one of those things, and it's a strain learning. I don't wear the arm all the time."

The inspector nodded. He turned back and continued to check through Thornwald's luggage. Finally, the two inspectors held a whispered conference and looked up.

"What are you doing on this planet, Mr. Thornwald?"

"I'm — I've come here to live. I'm a retired Interstellar Policeman."

"We noticed that. But this stuff looks suspicious. I think we'll have to hold you for questioning."

Thornwald backed away. "What's that? What kind of questioning? Is this a shakedown of some kind?"

"Orders of the Governor," the inspector said. "Come on, now — we'll put you away until the Governor can talk to you himself."

"Hold it, fellow," Thornwald warned. "I'm a policeman, and I know the law. You can't lock me away without a writ."

The other chuckled. "Oh no? Want to see how?"

Thornwald stepped forward and cracked his fist into the man's face without waiting for further conversation. The man went toppling backward, but the second one moved in and quickly caught Mac's arm. He lifted his blaster and whipped it across Thornwald's face.

Helpless, Thornwald tried to duck. The butt cut into his flesh just above the cheekbone, and he sagged limply.

"You'll come now, I think."

"**I**N HERE, Thornwald."

The door of a cell opened, and rough hands hurled Thornwald inside. The metal door clanked closed. Thornwald sat down on the hard cot in the corner of the cell and tried to rub the pain away.

Nice welcome, he thought. Half an hour on Bleekman's Planet and I've had my baggage confiscated, gotten a pistol-whipping, and got tossed into the jug. *Pleasant planet*. He rubbed his head and groaned.

"They give it to you bad?" a voice said.

"Who's there?"

"Don't jump," the voice said. "I'm your cellmate. The name is Miller. I've been here a week."

Thornwald squinted in the darkness and made out the dimly-visible form of a man huddled up against the wall in the far corner of the cell.

"Just arrive?" Miller said.

"Yes. And I'm pretty puzzled about this damned rough stuff. What kind of a world is this, anyway?"

Miller chuckled hollowly. "A lousy one. You're new here; you haven't felt the worst of it yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you're now the private property of Governor Lloyd Henderson and his paid thugs. I mean that Henderson runs this world, and there's nothing you or I or anybody else can do but knuckle under."

Thornwald sprang to his feet. "How is it the outside world doesn't know about this? How'd it happen? Who is this Henderson, anyway?"

"One question at a time," Miller said. "Why doesn't the outside world know? Simple. No one leaves Bleekman's Planet, and so nobody finds out. Not even a space liner lands here; it's too unimportant for that. A shuttle comes down.

"As for how it happened — well, do you know anything about

thylomine?"

"The cancer-curing drug?"

"That's the one. It's made from the *narkos* tree, which is found on Bleekman's Planet and a couple of other places. The leaves of the plant are rich in it. All you have to do is gather them and process them, and the drug can be made in quantity. Henderson's got the monopoly on *narkos*-growing here. He was a big farmer originally, who just bought everyone else out. Now he's the governor, and the thylomine trade is in his back pocket, along with the rest of the planet."

Thornwald kicked his foot against the wall angrily. "Of all the lousy worlds I had to pick to come to live on - - " He turned to his cellmate. "Why are you here?"

Miller shrugged. "Why are *you* here? Why is anyone here? Anyone who crosses Henderson gets dumped in here."

"But I didn't cross him," Thornwald protested. "I wasn't on the damn planet more than a minute before they grabbed me."

"There must be a reason. Maybe they think you're a spy from the Galactic Federation. That's what they fear worst of all — someone getting in here and spilling the beans to the rest of the universe."

"That must be it," Thornwald

agreed. "I'm a retired Police officer. They must think I'm here as a spy." He shook his head. "I've got to get out of here!"

"How are you going to do that?"

"Just wait and see." He cupped his hand. "Guard! *Guard!*"

HE YELLED a second time and a third. The sound of his shouting echoed down the prison corridor, reverberated from the walls hollowly. "Guard! Guard!"

"Okay," a bored voice said. "Quit yelling. What's the trouble in there?"

"It's my arm," Thornwald gasped. "It's hemmhoraging — I'm bleeding to death!"

"You that one-armed fellow they just brought in?"

"Yes, yes! Come on! Get me a doctor before I bleed to death!"

There was a note of desperate urgency in Thornwald's voice that was so convincing he could almost feel his stump throbbing.

"All right, I'll take a look," the guard said finally. He fumbled with his keys and inserted one, while Thornwald threw himself to the floor and lay there, writhing in apparently hideous pain.

"Where are you?"

"Down here," Thornwald said weakly. "I can't stand up. I — "

The guard bent to see what was

wrong, and Thornwald kicked upward at him. His boot took the jailer on the side of his jaw and knocked him backward against the wall. As he staggered there, stunned, Thornwald sprinted past him and out the cell door into the corridor.

"Get him, Miller!" he yelled as he broke away.

A bright stunbeam light spurted out as Thornwald left. He winced as it nicked him in one ankle, almost hamstringing him, but he kept going. Behind him, he heard the sound of Miller fighting with the bewildered guard.

Thornwald dashed down the corridor as well he could with one foot nearly crippled, reached the window, hoisted himself up with his arm, and crawled up to the ledge.

He smashed open the window and shimmied through.

He was out of jail now — or would be when he dropped the ten feet to the ground. But he wasn't out of trouble yet — not by a long shot.

* * *

The building up ahead was the Governor's Mansion — and that was the first stop, and, he hoped, the last.

The customs inspectors had said something about taking his trunk to the Governor. Good. Thornwald had to get to his trunk

before much more time elapsed.

His arm was in the trunk — the prosthetic arm. He was almost helpless one-armed, except where he could capitalize on the weapon of surprise. Once he got the prosthetic from his trunk —

He faded into the shadows as a uniformed figure passed by. One of Henderson's policeman, no doubt, making the night rounds. Thornwald let the man go by, then continued to glide among the shrubbery toward the impressive mansion that was Henderson's home.

Thornwald's mind revolved the situation over and over as he moved along. This world was Henderson's private property, and anyone who said different was jugged instantly. It was a world of terror in which a harmless stranger could become a hunted fugitive in a matter of minutes.

He reached Henderson's place. It was a walled mansion, as he expected. There were ways to get over walls, though, Thornwald reflected. He glanced around, found a strange-looking red-leaved tree whose angular limbs had the consistency of rubber, and dragged himself upward.

He reached the bough he wanted, grasped it firmly, and swung out over the wall. He landed — A foot away from a snarling, blazing-eyed ball of fury. Even

in the darkness, he could see the animal clearly — a Vegan *ghoslik*, all teeth and ferocity and mindless hatred. It snapped at the intruder.

Thornwald launched a vicious kick at the animal, and there was the sound of needle-sharp teeth splintering against his boot. The creature howled and bounded away into the darkness.

So much for your watchdog, Henderson. Now for the real job.

He tiptoed to a window and peered in. A uniformed man was in there, pacing up and down in a corridor. Thornwald smiled, picked up a rock, and hurled it through the window.

The guard whirled instantly, presenting his blaster. "Who goes there?"

Thornwald made no reply. The guard continued to peer out into the night. "Who's there?" he repeated.

As if in answer, Thornwald hurled another rock through the window. This time the guard dashed out of the corridor, up the stairs, and out into the courtyard — where Thornwald was waiting for him with a third rock.

"It's a good thing it wasn't my pitching arm I lost," he muttered gratefully as the guard crumpled. Swiftly Thornwald extracted the guard's blaster and stepped inside the building.

He edged down the corridor, blaster ready, and turned the corner. There was the sound of laughter coming from a room at the end of the hallway.

After a moment's thought, he crashed the butt of the blaster against a window in the corridor, then flattened himself against the wall and waited.

A few seconds later, a man appeared from the room beyond. "What was that noise?" he asked loudly.

Thornwald glanced down the hall. The man who approached was one of the customs inspectors who had beaten him up that afternoon. He fingered the blaster stud and stepped out to block the hallway.

"What — ?"

"Put your hands up," Thornwald ordered quietly. "And if you say a word, I'll roast your brains in your skull."

HE GLARED at the man. "All right, where's my luggage?"

The customs man met his stare grimly. "I don't know."

Thornwald's one arm whipped out and the blaster's barrel slapped the inspector across the face. A trickle of blood dribbled down. "Where's my stuff?" Thornwald repeated.

"Henderson's got it," the customs inspector said sullenly.

"And where's Henderson?"

"I'm not telling."

Crack! with the gun barrel.

"That's for this afternoon,"

Thornwald said. "Where's Henderson?"

"Fourth floor," the man gasped. Thornwald hit him again. "You sure?"

"I'm telling the truth! Fourth floor!"

The gun descended once again. Satisfied, Thornwald left the other crumpled on the floor, and started up the stairs to the fourth floor.

He wanted Henderson, now.

More than anything, he wanted his missing left arm back. Half a dozen times in the last thirty minutes he had cursed the frustrating necessity of fighting with only one hand. Even the prosthetic would do, the steel-thewed robot hand that he controlled with his mind. But for the present he'd have to manage with one hand.

He mounted the stairs and emerged on the fourth floor. An array of rooms confronted him. Which was Henderson's? He didn't know.

He started to enter one, picking it at random. Then he felt a cold pressure in the small of his back.

"You can stop right now," a dead,ly-sounding voice said. "There's a blaster in your back. Close that door."

Without turning, Thornwald backed up and closed the door.

"Now come with me," the voice said. "I'm taking you to Henderson."

The blaster prodded and he headed down the hall to another door.

"Mr. Henderson?"

"Yeah?" said a voice from within.

"It's me. Leswick. I caught a prowler wandering around up here."

"Right out," Henderson said.

The guard named Leswick prodded the blaster harder into Thornwald's back. "Mr. Henderson'll take care of you," he said ominously.

The door opened and Henderson stood there. He was a short, pudgy man with thick jowls and a soft, fleshy pink throat. He was wearing a black dressing-gown, flaked whitely with dandruff.

"Who are you?" Henderson asked coldly.

"I think he's the cop who landed today," Leswick said. "Didn't they say he had only one arm?"

"That's the one, all right," Henderson said. He reached out, grabbed Thornwald by the collar, and yanked him into the room. Covering him with a blaster, he said, "Go downstairs and get a couple more of the boys, Leswick. We'll see what we can get out of

this fellow."

THORNWALD GLANCED up at the trio of uniformed men facing him. "I'm not saying anything."

"Hit him again," Henderson commanded boredly.

A guard's fist flashed down and smashed into Thornwald's jaw. Thornwald spat blood and glared defiantly at Henderson.

"What do you expect to get out of me, Henderson?"

The Governor whirled and sneered at him. "You're a cop, aren't you?"

"I was."

"You still are! And you're down here to spy on us! Where's your transmitter?"

"I don't have any transmitter," Thornwald said. "I was fool enough to think I'd want to *live* here. I'm no more a spy than that bookcase is."

"Hit him again," Henderson said. "Give it to him until he tells us where the transmitter is."

A cascade of blows descended on Thornwald from all three of them. His head rocked dizzily beneath the assault. He stood it as long as he could.

Finally, he yelled, "Okay! I'll tell you!"

"Step back and let him talk," Henderson ordered. "All right, Thornwald. Where's the trans-

mitter?"

"It's . . . in . . . my . . . trunk." he said weakly. "The trunk."

"Go get the trunk," Henderson said to one of the men. "Bring it here."

A few minutes later, the man returned with Thornwald's trunk. "Force it open," said Henderson. "See if there's a transmitter in there."

The guards cracked the trunk's lock, threw open the lid, and searched the interior. Thornwald watched impassively as his shirts, tunics, ties, cloaks came flying out to land in an untidy heap on the floor.

"Well?"

"There's nothing in here but clothes and things," the guard reported. "And" — he gulped — "there's some kind of *arm* in there?"

"Arm?" Henderson repeated in surprise.

"It's a man's arm, boss."

"My prosthetic," Thornwald said. "I lost my arm in a space battle."

"And where's the transmitter, then?"

"It's concealed in the arm," Thornwald said.

Henderson frowned. "In the arm? How?"

"Surgically implanted," said Thornwald. "Take a look, if you don't believe me."

"Give me that arm," said Henderson.

The guard fished the prosthetic reluctantly from the trunk, and, handling it with the utmost delicacy, carried it over to Henderson. The Governor took the arm, examined it curiously, flexed the curled fingers.

"Where's the transmitter?" he asked.

Beads of perspiration sprang out on Thornwald's forehead. His neural network leaped out, made contact with the nerve-mesh of the arm. He was just five feet away from Henderson. That was close enough to activate the prosthetic.

Now! he thought.

The arm suddenly came alive in Henderson's hands. Before he could do anything, the fingers spread, grasped, reached upward, and wrapped themselves around Henderson's fleshy neck in an iron grip.

"**T**HAT THING'S got the chief!"

Thornwald held up his hand. "Tell your men to drop their blasters, Henderson. I assure you they can't kill me quick enough for me not to crush your throat with that arm."

Henderson emitted choking, strangling sounds that might almost have been, "Drop the guns!"

The Governor's florid face was bright red, and where the fingers dug into his throat the skin was a bloodless white.

The three guards looked around in dismay.

"Don't shoot him!" Henderson ordered. "Drop the guns!"

The blasters clattered to the floor. Thornwald picked one up, kicked the others away into the corner. Henderson remained transfixed in the center of the room, the bodyless arm clinging to his throat bizarrely.

"Where's your ultrawave radio?" Thornwald asked.

Henderson glared angrily and made no reply. Thornwald smiled apologetically and tightened his mental grip on the Governor's throat ever so slightly.

"Where's the ultrawave?" he repeated.

Henderson gestured to a niche in the wall. Warily, Thornwald stepped over to it. It was an ultrawave, all right. "Back to the wall," he said. "Okay, you three. If any of you makes a false move while I'm calling, Henderson dies — and *you'll* get the arm around your throat next."

He dialed the radio into operation with the muzzle of the blaster. There was a crackling sound, and then an operator's voice said, "Yes?"

"I want the Interstellar Police,"

Thornwald said.

"IP," said a metallic voice a few moments later.

"This is Mac Thornwald, retired captain. You know me?"

"Sure, Mac! What's up?"

"Listen carefully," Thornwald said. "Get a patrol-ship right down here now — Bleekman's Planet. There's trouble here. It's under control now, but the planet

will need a complete mopup."

"That's the place you were supposed to live, isn't it? The quiet little secluded planet out in a corner of the galaxy?"

Thornwald smiled grimly. "It'll be that way soon," he said. "Just as soon as you clean up a bunch of cheap crooks who can't beat a one-armed man."

THE END

★ *Splattering The Moon!* ★

MANY writers have proposed an attempt to mark the surface of the moon permanently. Old-time science-fiction writers thought of this act as sort of a symbol of Man's ability to get into space some day. Even Heinlein once thought of using the threat of trade-marking the moon with the name of a drink as a money getter for rocket research.

But in this fast-moving day, the possibility of marking old Luna's surface is all too real and might in fact be done before we the public know it.

From an aesthetic point of view it is quite possible that any plan to disfigure the moon's surface so that we'd have a permanent eyesore in the sky would be doomed to failure before it got well started.

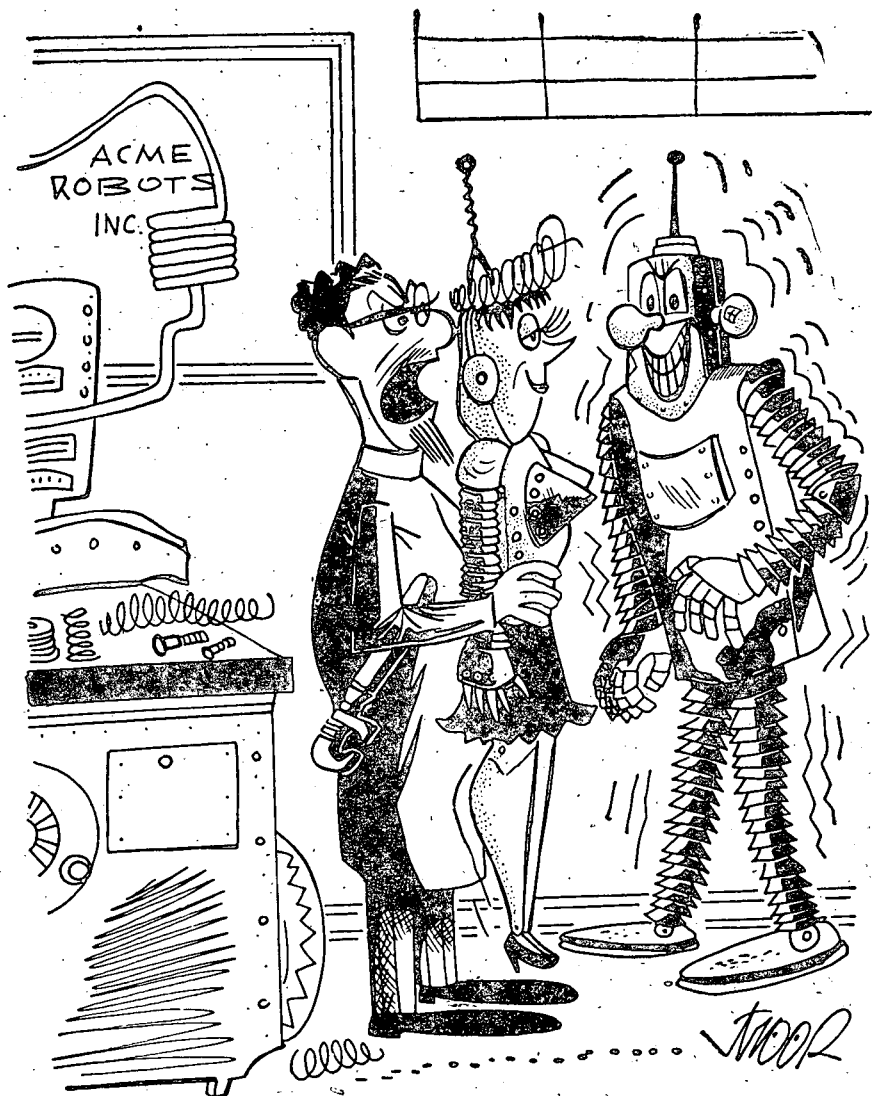
Never-the-less, it is not beyond the realm of probability that within the next decade, a plaster of paris laden rocket could be dumped on

the Moon to make a detectible mark.

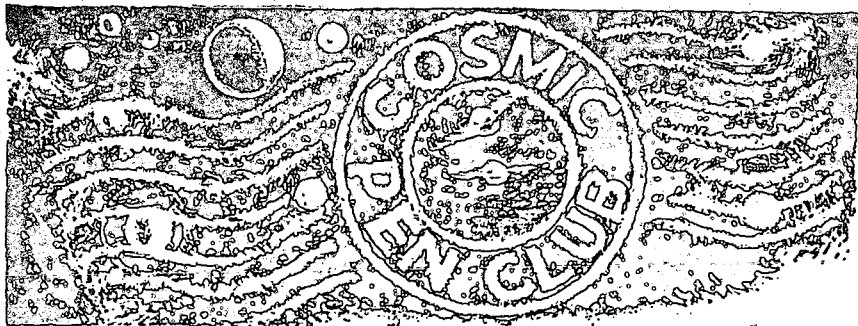
What a tremendous accomplishment this would be technologically speaking although admittedly it might be an artistic fiasco.

As a spur to rocket research it would have tremendous value. The fact that Man could reach out and touch, so to speak, his satellite, is a prideful thing. But that feat might seem as nothing to the inevitable fact that soon Man himself is going to be up there!

We think it will be safe to say that the Moon will eventually be marked by a powder-carrying rocket, but that the mark will not be visible to the naked eye. Telescopic observation will be required—perhaps opera glasses will do. Anytime one feels too humble—in this not distant future—he need only glance skyward "through a glass ... " and there see Man's handiwork at last in the Firmament...



"Here! Now get that frustrated look off your face!"



A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

PHYSICS MAJOR

Nicholas A. Beauchamp: 422 Brown Hall, Princeton University, Princeton, N. J.

Age 20, student: "I'm a senior in physics, interested in psionics, psychology, E. S. P. and cybernetics—but not in an advanced manner on the latter. Will welcome correspondence from anyone with similar interests."

MECHANICAL ENGINEER

Kenneth Norman Herbert: 58 Aston Lane, Perry Barr, Birmingham 20, England.

Age 26: "I'm single, Very English, 5' 7" in height; science fiction and fantasy are my religion making me both shortsighted and an incurable dreamer. My interests include films, people, and sport—mainly fencing. I also like cars and square-dancing."

My current occupation as a mechanical engineer is in the field of light alloy weight estimation. I'll welcome correspondence from anyone on any subject. I would rather argue than eat!"

HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR

Frank Gaylord: Route 5, Box 185, Vienna, Va.

Age 16, student: "I've been reading science fiction for three years and love it. I'd like to correspond with anyone who is interested in trading sci-fi books and magazines. I'd also like to contact any sci-fi fans in my geographical area."

CHIEF ORDER CLERK

John Hurdis: 81 Clearview Hghts., Apt. 2, Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Age 29: I'm married and have lived in Canada for five years. I'm

interested in publishing a science fiction fan magazine (have dabbled in printing, having a press of my own) and would like to hear from other fans interested in fan magazines. I'm also very interested in joining any "local fan groups."

WOULD-BE WRITER

John Butterworth: 37 Richmond Rd., Belmont 78, Mass.

Age 14, student: "I'm interested in writing and hope to follow it as a career after finishing school. I also enjoy 'rock 'n roll' (though NOT as represented by Elvis!) and at present am engaged in compiling my list of 'the best stf stories' of the year. I'll welcome correspondence from anyone else similarly inclined."

ADVANCED STUDENT

Walter H. Jogwick: 200 E. Oakland Ave., Columbus 1, Ohio.

Age 27: "I am presently working for my Master's Degree in mechanical engineering at Ohio State University. I hope to receive it before Xmas of this year. I am also interested in gas turbines, automobiles, and girls! I am, of course, single. I'd like to add that after December 20th my address will be: 1007 Dartmouth Ave., Charleston, West Va."

CIVIL SERVICE

Otis Lee Brock: 5903 88th St., SW, Tacoma 99, Wash.

Age 35: "I'm married, the father of two fine sons, 10 and 12. I'm a

clerk-typist in the Post Transportation Office at Fort Lewis. My hobby is reading and collecting science fiction, both books and magazines. I've been in the field for over fifteen years. I'd like to hear from other people in the field."

AMATEUR CHEMIST

Franklin Bergquist: Gen. Del., Edyville, Iowa.

Age 16: "I'm a student, very interested in chemistry. I like comedy in science fiction and would like to hear from others with my interests."

HOUSEWIFE

Colene Newton: 330 N. Folsom, Coquille, Ore.

Age 23: "I'm the mother of two girls, very interested in science fiction, and love to write letters. My husband approves! I'm especially interested in corresponding with anyone in a foreign land, and also servicemen abroad."

PLUMBER

George Roenspiess: 47 Merner Ave., Kitchener, Ont., Canada.

Age 20: "I'm interested in electronics and astronomy. I would especially like to hear from anyone interested in 'Project Vanguard.'"

SOPHOMORE

Linwood Kemp: 150 West St., Wilmington, Mass.

Age 15: "I'm male—in case the first name is confusing—with chief

interests: Christian Literature, foreign languages, and science fiction. My chief dislikes are football, baseball, and politics. Hope to hear from someone with similar likes."

NURSE

Mrs. Dorothy Shair: % Mrs. Marie Coon, 1347 E. Kern St., Ontario, Calif.

Age 30: "I have been interested in science fiction for the past eight years. My other interests include psychic phenomena, E. S. P., and study of the occult and supernatural."

COLLEGE STUDENT

Dainis Bisenieks: 303 Hinsdale House, East Quad, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Age 19: I'm a male college student at the University of Michigan. I read all science fiction magazines and have extensive back files. Would like pen pals both female and male, near and far. I'd like to discuss current and back science fiction and fantasy. I know German and would like to contact German fans. Studying French, so same for them."

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

Wayne Roberts: 1725 Jennifer, Houston 29, Texas.

Age 15: "My occupation at the moment is centered around the Galena Park High School in Galena Park, Texas. I follow a half dozen of the science fiction magazines and am interested in exchanging

ideas with others."

BOOK SALESMAN

Edward Kisch: 4873 Cochran St., Santa Susana, Calif.

Age 40: "I'm interested in writing, and also in publishing a science fiction fan magazine. I'm collecting data on sf authors and would like to hear from others with similar interests."

STUDENT

Paul Shulkes: 139 E. 53rd St., Brooklyn 3, N.Y.

Age 16: "I have been reading science fiction since the tender age of seven when I discovered Heinlein. I am interested in joining a science fiction club and would appreciate being contacted for this purpose."

STUDENT

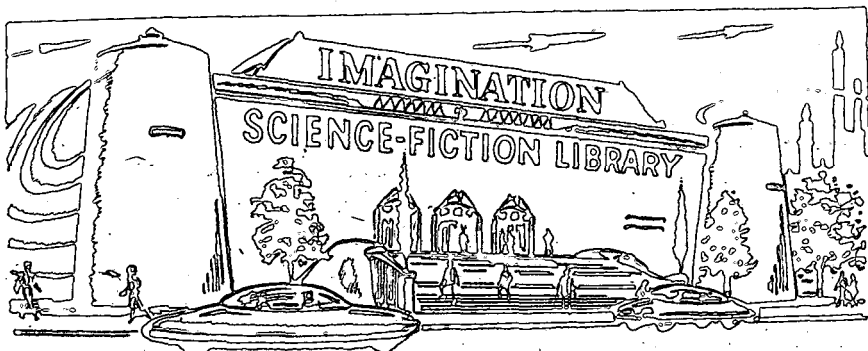
Robert Geary: 90-26 209th St., Bellerose 28, N. Y.

Age 14: "I am a confirmed reader of science fiction, sophomore in high school; I would like to hear from anybody interested in science fiction."

STUDENT

Mike Kington: 2141 Tulane, Long Beach 15, Calif.

Age 14: "I am six feet tall, blond, like chess, bowling, ice hockey, and football. Enjoy science fiction, love to dance, like girls, and will correspond with anyone who'll drop me a line."



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE LONG TOMORROW

by Leigh Brackett, 222 pages, \$2.95, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York.

"No city, no town, no community of more than one thousand people or two hundred buildings to the square mile shall be built or permitted to exist anywhere in the United States of America" — so reads the Thirtieth Amendment of the Constitution of the U.S.A. seventy-five years hence—two generations after the United States has been seared to destruction after the Atomic War.

The U.S. won the war, but is defeating itself with that amendment. For without cities industrial power cannot develop. The result is that the U. S. is an agricultural nation with an early steam-engine background. It is like the

U.S. before the Civil War.

Knowledge is discouraged and the nation is made-up of primitive, psuedo-religious groups who denounce learning.

But the story follows two boys who have heard vaguely of the mysterious — and hated — community where learning is pursued.

In terms of plot, it is a familiar story often attempted by science-fiction writers. But Leigh Brackett has produced an irresistibly compelling tale which you will not be able to stop reading once you've begun it. These are real people and it is not hard to imagine the Darkness of the times. Characterization and detail make this one of the most believable s-f. tales I've read in a long time and I recommend it without reservation.

Letters

from the Readers

SWEAT NO MORE!

Dear Bill Hamling:

A few days ago a friend ditched a pile of old magazines onto me. As I went through them I found an old copy of IMAGINATION. Immediately I was intrigued. I started reading and didn't stop until I'd gone through it from cover to cover. I really flipped.

I scrounged together 35c and roared off to the drugstore to get the new issue. The cupboard was bare. I tried another place and luckily found one copy unsold. I bought it.

I took it home, read it through, and really went crazy. The stories you guys print just can't be beat. When I reached page 130 my eyes nearly popped. Here was my chance to get your magazine for 36 issues plus three free books for my library. All for a measly nine-bucks.

Enclosed you will find nine sweaty bills for my sub. Worked for them so you can see I appreciate IMAGINATION very much.

Bill Robertson

2318 Cardenas

Albuquerque, New Mex.

Welcome into the fold, Bill. You'll find plenty of top-notch stories in your 36 issue sub. We trust the only sweat you'll work up now is waiting for each new issue to reach you!wlh

GOOD DAY OFF

Dear Mr. Hamling:

The merchants in our city take a breather every week closing the stores one day per week. You may wonder what this has to do with *Madge*. Simple.

The place where I work closed today so I stayed home to catch up on some reading. I went to a pile of mags on my shelf and took down some copies of *Madge*. I read all the lead novels starting with "DON'T PANIC!" (November '54) through CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS in the October issue of this year.

Believe me, it was really a rewarding experience. I enjoy the stf that Boucher, Campbell and Gold print, but I'm happy to say now

that science fiction as it should be written is published by Bill Hamling.

As I say, it's been a long day of reading, but a pleasant one!

Alan Cheuse
154 Lewis St.

Perth Amboy, N.J.

Your letter made our day pleasant too. *wlh*

PUNK NUMBER

Dear wlh:

I just finished the October issue of *Madge*. For the first time in fifty-one issues I can fairly say that there was nothing in my favorite stf mag worth reading.

Now take Ed Hamilton, for instance. He is normally a very fine writer. One of the best, in fact. This past year he has had three stories published in your mags. The first two were below par, both for himself and *Madge* and *Tales*. The third, in that terrible October issue, was infantile. It was written for a mental ten-year-old. And I'm sure that very few of your readers are mentally ten.

The stories by Tennessee, Thames, Purcell, and Granger were, in each case, the worst stories you have printed by these authors. Jorgensen was up to his usual boring, scarcely literate style. After perusing this pallid poppycock, I turned to the regular features—most of which I regularly enjoy. And what do I find? Let me tell you.

The editorial. Here I discover the same sticky goo you have been plastering on page six for the past umpteen issues. As a movie review

column it may be good, but remember, this is supposed to be an editorial. Once upon a time you used to write this page like you were thinking when you were doing it. How about trying again?

And then we come to the letter section. It's been dying for several issues, but this time it was finished for good. It had as much life as a dish of day-old oatmeal. Soggy.

Bloch's column was funny. I just love his description of the Chicago club meeting. No snobs, he says. No 'exclusiveness' he says. Well, I was at that meeting, and if it hadn't been for a couple of nice guys there, (you were one of them, Bill) another fan and myself might have come away from that affair with the notion that fandom wasn't for us. All of which spoiled FAN-DORA'S BOX for me.

I'm not worrying though. *Madge* will be up to her usual high standard next issue. At least, it *better* be!

Jeremy Millett
1446 Garden St.
Park Ridge, Ill.

Well now, one issue out of fifty-one on the "poor" side isn't too bad a batting average. Yet we can't quite agree with you that October was so punk . . . fortunately we're not alone in this view! Anyway, let us know how we're doin' now . . . wlh

MORE HAMILTON SOON

Dear Bill:

After reading the October issue I felt I just had to write in and give you one man's opinion.

First off, your cover by Rognan was terrific. It displayed plenty

of action. A real eye-catcher.

Having read some of Ed Hamilton's work in past issues, his CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS didn't surprise me this time as being one of the best yarns I have read in any sf magazine. Let's have more novels by Hamilton!

Tenneshaw's TROUBLE ON SUN-SIDE was also quite enjoyable. WORLD OF THE HUNTER by C. H. Thames made good reading, though nowhere as good as his novel FOREVER WE DIE! in the August issue. Remainder of the stories for October were good. Quite.

Two-color interior illustrations are something I haven't found in other sf magazines. Makes Madge look very attractive and distinctive. Your cartoons and features are all fine too.

Incidentally, after receiving some back issues of Madge a month ago, I decided to do likewise with Imaginative Tales, so I'm ordering some. Keep up the good work with both books. I'll be sticking with you from here on out.

Bruce Taylor
168 Alling St.
Kensington, Conn.

Lloyd Rognan has some terrific covers coming up soon, and Ed Hamilton is a MADGE and TALES regular so don't worry about stories with his byline. There'll be a lot in the near future. Glad you like the use of two-color inside the books. Just one of the extras we offer to our readers wlh

HE'S HOOKED!

Dear Bill:

I'm enclosing my sub order for

Madge, which, as far as I can see is THE science fiction magazine.

I started reading science fiction when a few months ago I went into a drug store to get the latest issue of a sports car book. The sports book was sold out, so, having 35c to burn I noticed the cover of the June issue of Madge, (which has not been surpassed by any other mag) took it home, read it, and I'd like to say the first s-f story I ever read was the best—BATTLE FOR THE STARS—and the second best. I just finished in the October issue—CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS. So rush the first issue of my sub to me. I'll be in the mailbox, waiting!

Butch Darby
2254 Tecumseh
Baton Rouge, La.

We'll be waiting next to ours for your next letter wlh

THIS "MADGE" MAG

Dear Bill:

This is the first time I've read IMAGINATION, and after reading CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS in the October issue I decided not to make it the last. I think you have a swell mag.

I especially like stories which take place on other planets and give a good imaginative description thereof, therefore a story like TROUBLE ON SUN-SIDE really rates high with me. WORLD OF THE HUNTER didn't rate as high, but I liked JOHN HARPER'S INSIGHT and DAY OF THE COMET.

What is this "Madge" I keep reading about in the letter column?

Joseph Fehete, Jr.
Cooley Rd., Rd. 2
Grafton, Ohio

"Madge" is the nickname for IMAGINATION. The name originally was supplied by Forrest J. Ackerman, our SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE columnist in our companion magazine, IMAGINATIVE TALES. The nickname has stuck with us from the very first issue back in 1950. w/h

SITTING PRETTY

Dear Bill:

Just finished the October issue of *Madge* and man, what a lead novel! Seems you have the jump on everyone in getting Ed Hamilton to return with his action-adventure type stories. Believe me, I was getting sick of that psi-esper stuff. You just keep it up and soon we'll have real science fiction in all the magazines—and the socio-psychological junk can sink back into that limbo from whence it sprung.

Another huzzah for your covers. In Rognan, Mal Smith, and Terry, you have three of the very best artists. Now corner Finlay and you'll be sitting pretty. Not that you aren't already!

Chuck Morris
Rt. 6, Box 34
Gaffney, S. C.

We can't speak for the other magazines in the field, but in IMAGINATION and IMAGINATIVE TALES you'll always find the type of stories you like best. As to Finlay, we'll see what we can do to make our sitting that much prettier.

. w/h

OUT OF THE FOLD . . . ?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

As is my habit I stopped at the corner drug store to see if any new magazines had come in. One had. Unfortunately. I bought it and walked home with the October issue of *Madge*. Follows my reaction to it and dislikes of your magazine in general:

Item: Your lead story, CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS was nothing but tripe. The alien invaders from outer space is an over-worked plot already, but *Madge* need not contribute to its mediocrity.

Item: The only excellent stories in the October issue were Thames' WORLD OF THE HUNTER and Ivar Jorgensen's DAY OF THE COMET. Both of which could have been improved upon.

Item: The remainder of your stories were literary trash. Not one good plot and the characters were all unconvincing.

Item: *Madge's* editorials are despicable. Her book reviews are even worse, and the letter section is downright gibberish. The letters rant and rave in awe and praise you do not deserve.

Item: *Madge* boosts its ego by printing letters with fanatics rambling on and on, upon the literary quality of your magazine. Yet not once have I seen an sf story from the pages of IMAGINATION appear in an anthology. If your magazine printed such good fiction would not one of these so-called literary gems appear in an anthology?

Item: You consider your magazine as one of the top publications in the s-f world. But the truth is

you rank at the bottom of the list. If you believe this isn't true, check the eight top magazines published in the opinion of Judith Merrill in SF, THE YEAR'S GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY. *Madge* is not even mentioned, let alone rated.

Conclusion: *Madge* is, in my opinion, one of the worst magazines published. Her stories are in character "juvenile", immature, and tripish in general. The interior color, illos and cover do no more than classify you as a "sensationalism" magazine.

Since 35c is too much for a hundred and thirty pages of tripe, you may consider me out of the fold.

Steve Willett
221 Via Los Altos
Redondo Beach, Cal.

We don't have to claim Madge is at the top of the pile - - our sales figures compared to the competition bear this out for us. And that means that more people prefer Madge than most others in the sci-fi field. Your "items" of course are absurd, for example, many of Madge's stories have been anthologized. And we do mean many. Matter of fact, one anthology was named after the magazine: So Miss Merrill didn't mention us? So what? Anyway, why all this emphasis on anthologies? An anthology is only one person's opinion of what's good, and that one person means nothing when stacked against the entire readership of a given magazine. Madge is always proud to point to its readers—the many tens of thousands of them. We love them all—even you. Bet you'll be around with another

letter soon.

..... wlk

REAL GONE BOOK!

Dear Bill:

Man, your book is real gone—I mean the October issue of IMAGINATION. I don't write to many editors of science fiction, but I'm doing it now to tell you *Madge* is great, the most, cool.

Your stories are magnificently written and I enjoy them. —Yet one thing about the magazine bothers me. On your covers each issue, in the upper left, you have an abbreviation, 'ANC. What does that stand for? (A. Nice Cover!)

Your cartoonist, Luther Scheffy, has a great Imagination for making that hairy glob the reader's pet. I get quite a kick out of his "monster". Hope you'll keep us supplied with Scheffy cartoons in all future issues.

Herb Clark
19 Robbins St.
Waltham 54, Mass.

ANC is an abbreviation of our national distributor, The American News Company, used for identification purposes in the retail trade. Yep, many more Scheffy cartoons on tap.

..... wlk

ON THE UP SIDE

Dear Bill Hamling:

The October issue of *Madge* shows quite a bit of improvement over your pretty good August issue. By that I mean that your August issue was good, but ... I'll drop it there!

Best for October was CITADEL OF THE STAR LORDS. It was almost a brand new plot and was carried out very well. This, I believe,

was Edmond Hamilton's best novel so far.

Second, **WORLD OF THE HUNTER**. C. H. Thames should be proud of this little gem. The plot contradicted every known fact about hunting, which is what made it so interesting.

Third, **DAY OF THE COMET**. Have you ever run a novel by Ivar Jorgensen? If so, what issue? His short this time was very good.

Fourth, **TROUBLE ON SUNSIDE**. This was well-written and well plotted. Do you think that Tenneshaw would consider a series character?

Eddy Gorman, Jr.
119 1st Ave. SW

Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Nope, we haven't featured a novel by Ivar Jorgensen, though we've run many of his short stories. Tell you what, we'll work on it and have a hunch we can get the lad to produce a humdinger! Tenneshaw is a very busy writer these days, not only doing work in the science fiction field, but also the men's magazine field. He has a beautiful yarn coming up in **ROGUE** magazine, which is the big brother of our publishing company. You might look for the February **ROGUE** at your newsdealer. Bob Bloch is also in the issue. Which about winds up shop for this time. Turn the page and subscribe. wh

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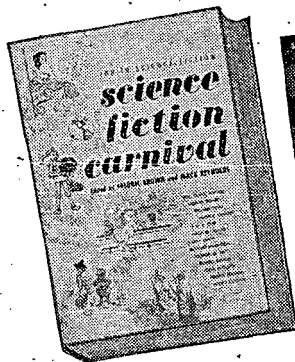
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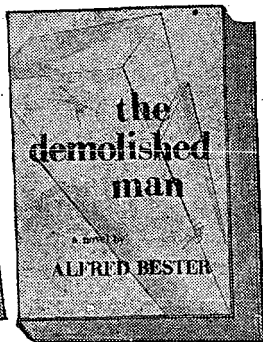
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